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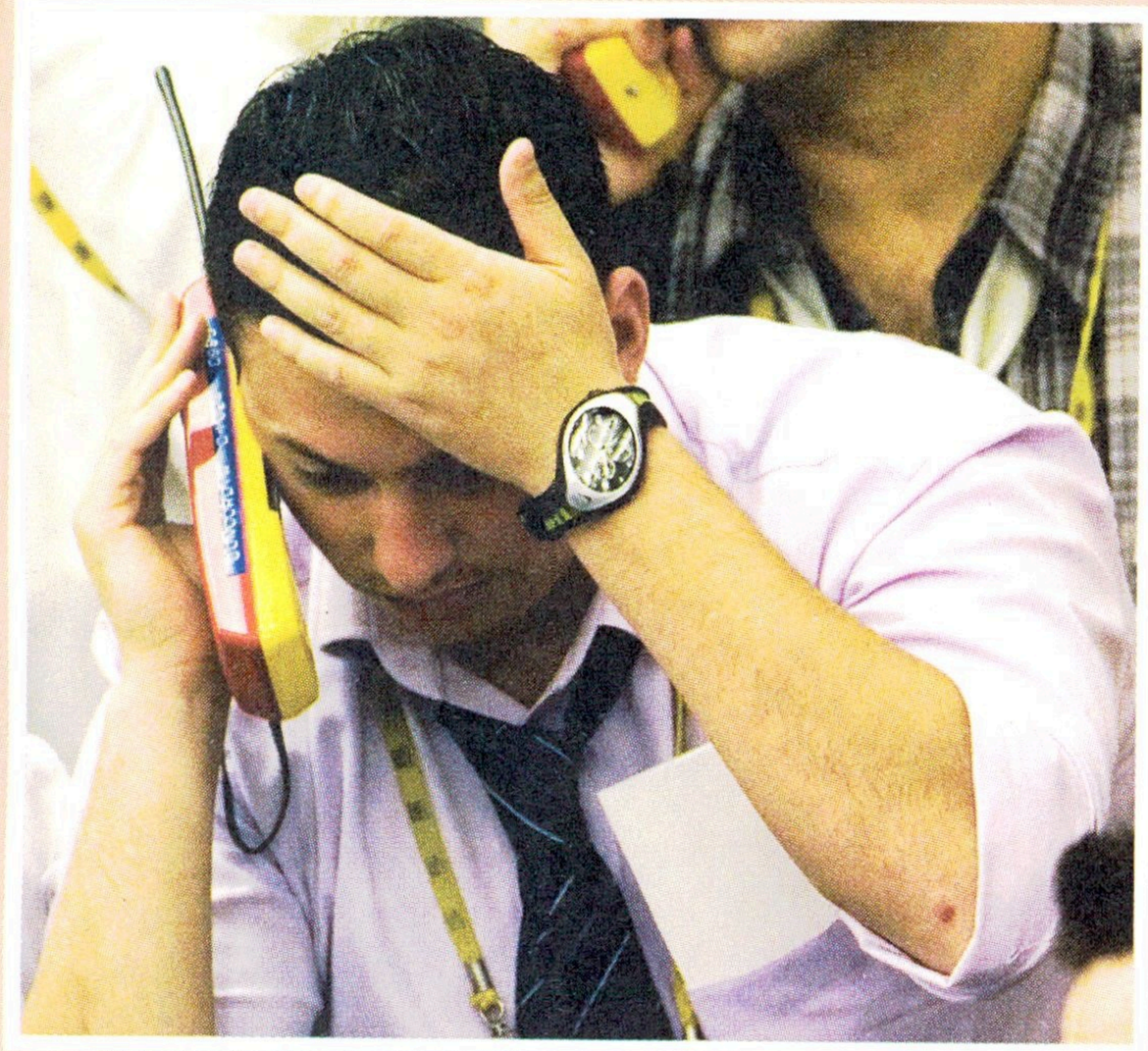
PRIVATE EYE

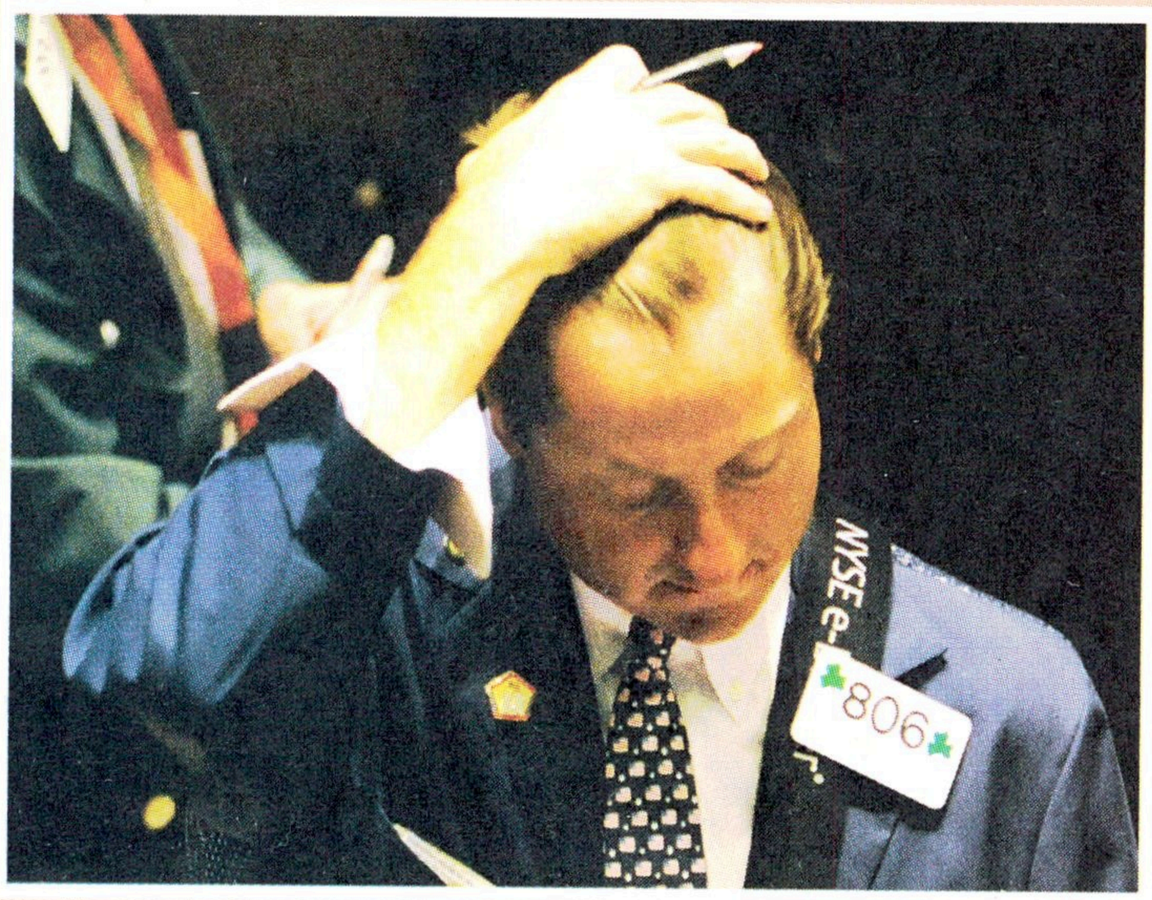
INSTANT STOCK MARKET ANALYSIS

AN AT-A-GLANCE GUIDE TO THE WORLD'S FINANCIAL STATUS



1. Down Toilet

2. Slight Rally



3. Toilet Again

4. Armageddon

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

HOW DID WE COME UP WITH THE LONGEST BUSINESS FLATBEDS IN THE SKY?

airnewzealand.co.uk

AIR NEW ZEALAND

Is it just a Kiwi thing?

THE ROYAL BANK OF GNOME

THE Royal Bank of Gnome has been taken over as of this morning by the Government.

I welcome this development and I am happy to give a reassurance to members of my family that my money is perfectly safe.

Despite my sadness at leaving a bank that I have done so much for over the years, I can walk away with the knowledge that I have done everything in my power to safeguard my salary, bonuses and pension scheme. Investors may take comfort in the knowledge that although they have lost all their money, I haven't.

I wish the Government the best of luck as I start my new career as a financial adviser to HM Treasury.

LORD FRED GNOMEWIN
(Formerly Royal Bank
of Gnome [RBG]
Now National Bank of
Gnome [NBG])

"Your money is safe in my safe"

"Thank God I put my money into drink"

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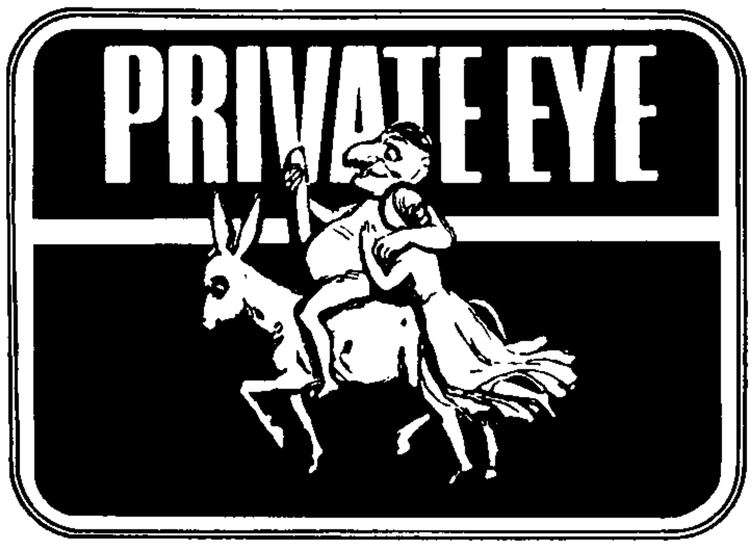

'RS' ABOUT FACE

WHO says the government wasn't interested in regulating as the banks sailed towards disaster?

In 2005 the treasury directorate responsible for regulatory policy, "Finance, Regulation and Industry", had a long, hard think and decided to change its name to "Finance and Industry", the dreaded "R" word having become unmentionable in Whitehall unless prefixed by de-.

The Tories have been no less allergic to the term. As John Redwood wrote in August 2007 in *Freeing Britain to Compete*, a report for David Cameron by the Conservative policy commission on economic competitiveness: "We see no need to continue to regulate the provision of mortgage finance, as it is the lending institutions rather than the client taking the risk."

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

"The Liberal Democrat motion has been much commented on, possibly because it reads like the storyboard for *Apocalypse Now*, or perhaps even *Bleak House*. According to the motion, we are facing an 'extreme bubble in the housing market' and the 'risk of recession'... Fortunately for all of us, however, that colourful and lurid fiction has no real bearing on the macro-economic reality..."

– Angela Eagle MP, exchequer secretary to the treasury, 2 April 2008.

"I do not see how anyone can table a motion that suggests that we are nearing a recession and that we are in all sorts of economic gloom... I cannot see how anyone can come to the House and say that there will be a recession."

– George Mudie MP, Labour member of treasury committee, 2 April 2008.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£0m Pay-off that will go to Royal Bank of Scotland chief executive Sir Fred Goodwin, forced to quit as condition of government bail-out

£2.86m Performance bonus Sir Fred Goodwin received for his work last year manoeuvring RBS into position where it needed £20bn bail-out

£8.37m Pension fund built up by Sir Fred Goodwin at RBS

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Mr. Darling used to boast to Wendy that her mother not only loved him but respected him. He was one of those deep ones who know about stocks and shares. Of course no one really knows, but he quite seemed to know, and he often said stocks were up and shares were down in a way that would have made any woman respect him."

– J. M. Barrie, *Peter and Wendy*.

Banks for the memories

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NICE to know that beleaguered chancellor Alistair Darling still has time to read the *Eye*.

In a Commons exchange last Wednesday with Respect MP George Galloway, the latter raised the question of the taxpayer having a seat in bank boardrooms, before praising the performance of the chancellor and prime minister in recent days.

Darling: I am grateful to the hon. gentleman for his unaccustomed support for our position. I shall make the most of it. In relation to government nominees sitting in boardrooms, I never thought that a particularly useful course of action to follow...

Galloway: Oh yes you did!

Darling: Oh no I didn't – and now I know who wrote that column in *Private Eye*; I always thought it was the hon. gentleman.

Darling wasn't only wrong about the source of the recent *Eye* article on his left-leaning past (issue 1218), but he'll also have to eat his words about boardroom interference. In return for oodles of taxpayers' cash, the government will have a direct say in how banks are run!

AT the end of each parliamentary year, John McDonnell, Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington, doggedly lodges an early-day motion calling for a windfall tax on fat cat city bonuses.

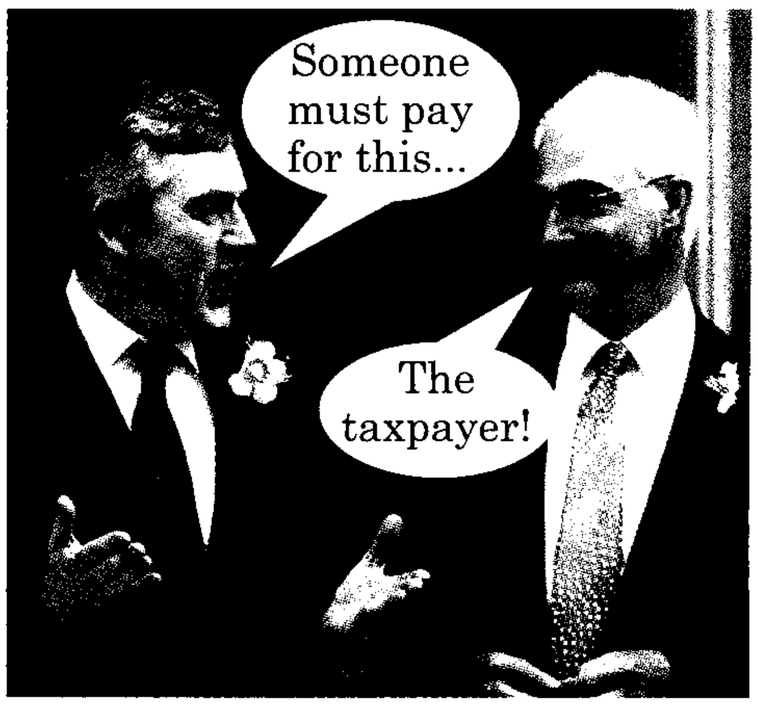
Invariably he only ever attracts a handful of signatures from the awkward squad. Until now, that is: this year the number is 48 MPs and rising. How brave of McDonnell's newest friends to lend their support now that bonuses are facing extinction anyway. Let's hope they're not expecting any dividends from a windfall tax any time soon.

JUST FANCY THAT 2

A British bank is run with precision
A British home requires nothing less!
Tradition, discipline, and rules must be the tools
Without them – disorder! Chaos!
Moral disintegration!
In short, we have a ghastly mess!

– Mr Banks, *Mary Poppins* (with thanks to *Eye* reader Chris Maclean of Faversham)

TOUGH RESCUE DEAL FOR BANKS



Iceland and a PR blizzard

WHY did so many Britons entrust their money to Icesave? Most of the credit (*sic*) should go to Kinross & Render, the London corporate PR firm hired to publicise Icesave's British launch two years ago.

K&R had the task of persuading punters that a hitherto unheard-of online bank in Iceland was just the place for their life savings, and it succeeded so magnificently that the firm collected the Financial Services Forum award for "most effective PR campaign". With understandable pride, K&R then produced an "Icesave case study" revealing how it used "the full spectrum of public and media relations solutions" to hype up the Icelandic interloper.

Phase one was a pre-launch programme of briefings. "An Ice Bar went on tour to the offices of NatMags and IPC Media, with briefings held at the stand over iced tea and coffee for personal finance, website and features editors."

Hacks were also given an Icesave goody bag containing "products that summarised the best things about Iceland". Who could resist such an inducement? By the next day, puff pieces about the new bank were appearing on the websites of *Good Housekeeping*, *Web User* and *What Investment*. After the launch, a "further swathe of positive coverage" was generated by taking hacks from the *Financial Mail on Sunday*, *Management Today*, *Moneywise* and *Woman & Home* on a freebie to Iceland.

Within three months of the launch, K&R's unflagging efforts had achieved 148 "overwhelmingly supportive" news stories and features. Typical headlines ranged from *MoneyMail*'s "A hot rate on offer at Icesave" to the *Independent on Sunday*'s "The Iceman cometh and savers swoon". The *Guardian* ran a full-page piece featuring photos supplied by the PR agency. K&R prepared case studies which were then run as news items by the *Sunday Times* under the headlines "Icesave looks like a hot deal" and "Savers told to dump ING for Icesave". Four months after its launch, Icesave had more than 60,000 British customers and deposits of £2bn – and, as K&R was quick to point out, "a significant proportion of the consumer rush to the [Icesave] website could be linked to PR".

So what does Kinross & Render have to say now about its siren-voiced skill in luring savers to their doom? The homepage of its website still flags up a press release issued on 24 April this year, headed "Icesave looks to the future to protect its savers", which boasted that Icesave had been shortlisted in two categories for the "prestigious" Moneyfacts awards for 2008. It also includes the K&R mission statement: "We only promise what we can deliver." Anything about more recent newsworthy developments in the Icelandic saga? Not a word.

BBC website, 12.10.08

Street Of Shame

"WE FIRST warned Icelandic banks were in danger of going bust on 16 March," the *Mail on Sunday* boasted last weekend. "We followed this up with lengthy advice to savers in brands such as Icesave on what might happen if the tiny country was forced to cope with a Northern Rock-style collapse."

Up to a point, Lord Rothermere. The *MoS* seems to have forgotten that it was still recommending cash deposit accounts and fixed bonds with Icesave in June and August.

Its sister paper, the *Daily Mail*, had the grace to grovel for leading readers into the black hole that was the Icelandic financial system. As *Money Mail* editor Tony Hazel confessed last Wednesday: "*Money Mail* was happy to recommend Icesave… We underestimated the speed and severity of the banking crisis. We got it wrong and for that we apologise."

By Friday, however, the *Mail*'s self-righteousness was back in full working order as it vilified "the councils, police and fire authorities whose 'experts' invested £1bn in Iceland's banks… Amazingly, they were piling into Iceland's banks as recently as September – five months after questions were being raised about their perilous state."

Why oh why? Perhaps they'd been reading the *Mail*, where on 10 September Tony Hazel told readers about "great savings rates" available from Icesave. "Grab these sparkling fixed-rate deals," he advised, "before they vanish." Er, quite.

Even as recently as 1 October, the *Mail* was still trumpeting: "Top internet accounts include Icesave." Elsewhere, the *Independent on Sunday*, the *Guardian,* the *Sunday Times* and the *Sunday Telegraph* all recommended Icesave during September.

Pride of place must, however, go to the *Daily Express*, which on 7 October, the very day customers were being met with the message that "We are not currently processing any deposits or any withdrawal requests", recommended to readers: "If you are lucky enough to have some spare money, now could be the time to cash in. Icelandic bank Icesave pays 7.06 percent on £1,000 or more on its one-year bond."

"GETTING on to that property ladder that everybody keeps talking about, and having a smart London bolthole as a bonus, would suit me down to the ground. Anyway, it all sounds rather fun."

So guffawed James Waldron in the *Spectator* on 24 September, advising readers to hurl their money in the direction of Johnny Sandelson's GuestInvest, offering buy-to-let hotel rooms in the capital which investors can use themselves and profit from when others stay in them.

"If you're worried all this sounds a bit artsy and silly for serious investment consideration in these troubling times, it should be noted that the management crew includes Caroline King, formerly head honcho of Home House. Then, for true commercial gravitas, there's Sir Mark Weinberg."

Following this wholehearted endorsement, GuestInvest lasted a full eight days before going into administration.

IT'S A MYSTIC MUGG'S GAME

READERS of the *Times* may be disgruntled with the paper's economic guru Anatole Kaletsky (see last *Eye*), but at least they only pay 80p a day for his worthless wisdom.

Clients of Gavekal, the advice service he founded with the French financial analyst Charles Gave, have to shell out $10,000 a year. Gavekal boasts that these subscribers are "institutional investors and very high net worth individuals", but presumably even they expect something in return.

Last year they received spectacularly dud advice on many of the big issues, as Kaletsky and his colleagues insisted that there was nothing wrong with the US housing market, that the US dollar would rise against the euro (it then tanked) and that European stocks could never outperform their rivals (they did). Last November Gavekal predicted that a "year-end rally" would send share-prices soaring by Christmas – whereupon the world share-index recorded the second-worst December performance in at least 25 years.

This year Kaletsky has been tying himself in knots over the likelihood of a US recession. In a Gavekal newsletter titled "The Recession that Never Was", issued two months ago, he confidently asserted that "Even... perma-bears will eventually realise that if any part of the world is hit by catastrophe as a result of the credit crunch, it will be Europe, not America or Asia." A month later, under the heading "Wall Street Chaos Doesn't Mean Recession", he wrote: "We have continued to argue that the US economy will avoid recession and the Government rescue of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac would probably mark the low-point of the economic slowdown."

As the crisis worsened and the market dived, Kaletsky had to abandon his forecasts of a soft landing for the American economy. Who got the blame? Not Kaletsky himself, for failing to read the tea leaves, but US treasury secretary Hank Paulson, who "needlessly sabotaged the global financial system" with his bailout plan. In vicious *ad hominem* attacks at meetings with Gavekal investors, he derided Paulson's intelligence and compared him to Andrew Mellon, the hapless treasury secretary during the Great Depression.

Kaletsky now acknowledges that "some clients have poured scorn on us for blaming Mr Paulson": they accuse the sage of "using him as a scapegoat to distract attention from our failure to anticipate a US recession that would have happened anyway, with or without Paulson's help". Full marks for candour. But some of these clients are also wondering if the $10,000 they pay to watch Anatole Kaletsky eat his hat mightn't be better spent on a bulk-purchase of *Old Moore's Almanac*.

PS: Following our Hackwatch in the last *Eye*, a reader has pointed out that Kaletsky's Mystic Mogg talents aren't confined to economic soothsaying. In his *Times* column of 17 October 2002, he asked how likely it was that America would invade Iraq. "Absolutely inevitable, if you judge by the tabloid headlines. Almost certain, if you listen to the pundits and military analysts." But he disagreed. "It seems to me that peace is considerably more likely than war in Iraq, at least for the next 12 months." Five months later, America duly invaded Iraq.

***TELEGRAPH* rugby columnist Will Greenwood delivered a two-page puff for the start of the Heineken Cup last Saturday, culminating in this advice for the winning team: "Fill the ice-bath with Heineken. But only when you've won the damned thing. No point putting your body in the cold water. You've done all the hard work, have a rest and enjoy a couple of pints."**

All most satisfying for the Dutch beer company, which employs Greenwood as a "brand ambassador" – a lucrative sideline that he somehow forgot to mention.

***MAIL on Sunday* columnist Suzanne Moore may be an old leftie, but that doesn't mean she's willing to slum it with the proles.**

The well-fed hackette agreed to fly to the US, business class, to co-write a piece with black writer David Williams about his slave roots. When editor Peter Wright baulked at the cost of the tickets, she refused to budge. Happily, they thought of a way round the problem: while she gets to drink champagne up front, poor Williams will be transported in goat class. Just like the good old days, eh?

IN ALL the speculation about why Ruth Kelly is leaving the cabinet and retiring from parliament, no one has mentioned the obvious reason: she had just received what every politician dreads: the blessing of Mystic Mogg.

"A leadership election this autumn would show whether Labour has run out of intellectual creativity, or if there are new people who would put themselves forward," William Rees-Mogg mused in the *Times* last month. "If, again, one looks at US politics, one might see greater vitality among the women. I am probably biased in favour of Ruth Kelly, as a fellow Roman Catholic, but she has a genuine individuality of interests and ideas. I think she could rescue Labour…"

Instantly realising that her career was over, Kelly had no choice but to pack it in. Nice work, Moggie!

TEN years ago, following the death of Princess Diana, the press complaints commission (PCC) code of practice was tightened up specifically to protect the privacy of the next generation of royals. Whereas before children had only been protected from the press up to the age of 16, a new clause ruled: "Young people should be free to complete their time at school without unnecessary intrusion."

So what was the *Sun* to do when it came into possession of a snap of Princess Eugenie and three of her curvaceous teenage friends dressed as naughty nurses at a party held at her school, Marlborough College? Simple! It held off publishing the photograph until the princess, who turned 18 in March, had left the school and started her gap year.

The educational status, identity and age of the three other schoolgirls pictured "sporting saucy get-up" alongside her are unknown.

Job: French into English Profreading
Posted: 10:18 GMT
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THE ZZZ-LIST

Truly pathetic non-stories about celebrities from the national press…

"In her column last week, Fiona McIntosh claimed that Natasha Kaplinsky failed to clean up her dog's droppings and had to be told to do so by the police. In fact, Natasha cleaned up the mess herself without prompting. We are sorry for this error."

– Sunday Mirror, 5 October

ALAS for Petronella Wyatt, the fall-out from her recent interview with Sir Richard Branson continues.

First she had the humiliation of playing back her recording of the hour-long interview to the *Mail*'s legal team after Beardie complained that she'd made up quotes. The tape confirmed that she had indeed, and the *Mail* apologised.

Now poor Petsy has been told that, for the foreseeable future, her interviews are surplus to requirements.

"IN A foul-mouthed rant that included 52 expletives, Joe Kinnear raged at football journalists in the north-east. We apologise as the language used may offend some readers, but here we reproduce an abridged version of a transcript of the exchange," said the *Daily Mail*.

But if *Mail* readers were offended by what followed, they would have been even more shocked by the language used by editor Paul Dacre. On the previous day, every other newspaper had led its sports pages with the Newcastle manager's tirade (verbatim), while the *Mail* buried it inside. Realising that this was the story of the day, Dacre called in his sports team to unleash one of his famous "Vagina Monologues", a foul-mouthed rant that included at least 52 expletives plus a warning that if they didn't go big on it the next day they could expect the same fate as Kinnear's predecessor, Kevin Keegan.

THERE was some puzzlement among *Independent* readers in Northern Ireland when the paper launched its "new full colour edition".

Inside was a gushing blurb from editor Roger Alton: "You may have noticed a new look to your *Independent* today. This is because, for the first time in the newspaper's history, we have moved to full colour publication." But the page on which this appeared was printed in black and white, as were about half the other pages.

The *Indie*'s Northern Irish edition is printed by its sister paper, the *Belfast Telegraph*, and *Indie* hacks had been warned that to secure their slot on the *BT* press they must send all copy over by 9pm. Alas! The deadline was missed by an hour on the first night, so the "historic edition" with Alton's ravings about a "bright new chapter" was consigned to an older press which couldn't handle full colour.

A LONG feature in last Monday's *Telegraph* celebrated Michael Gambon's return to the West End in the new production of Harold Pinter's *No Man's Land*.

The piece was written by Jasper Rees – who, by happy coincidence, lives with Sonia Friedman, the producer of *No Man's Land*.

WHAT a well-qualified bunch Richard "Dirty" Desmond and his senior lieutenants are! The potted biographies on his Northern & Shell website proudly give their titles and qualifications…

There's finance director "Robert Sanderson, FCCA", editorial director "Paul Ashford, PhD", and the two joint managing directors "Stan Myerson, LL.B" and "Martin Ellice, MM". (Military Medal? Master of Maths? Mass Murderer? No one seems to know.)

And then there's the boss himself, billed as "Richard Desmond, RCD". Some sort of honorary degree, perhaps? Er no: RCD are Dirty Des's initials, and the numberplate of his car!

NOT SO much *The X Factor* as "the cringe factor", according to a most unflattering article on Simon Cowell and his crooners' contest in last Saturday's *Times*.

"What happens to some of those young people is humiliating and demeaning," Mick Hucknall told the paper, while culture secretary Andy Burnham admitted that he "shares Hucknall's reservations".

One man with no such reservations is the *Times*'s owner. On the recommendation of his daughter Elisabeth, the Dirty Digger employs Cowell on a $36m salary to present a US version of the show, *American Idol*, on Fox TV. Cringeworthy indeed!

"THE American murder suspect Amanda Knox has described how she saw Meredith Kercher wake on the last day of her life, at their cottage in the Italian town of Perugia, 'with blood dripping from her chin' after dressing as a vampire for a Hallowe'en party the previous night," reported a breathless John Follain in the *Sunday Times* on 28 September.

"The unpublished account obtained by the *Sunday Times* is a confidential email Knox sent to friends three days after the murder."

Not *that* confidential, though – given that its contents had appeared in the *Daily Mail* exactly three months earlier, when hack David Jones boasted that "I was given exclusive access to a previously unseen, four-page email which Knox circulated to her closest relatives and friends."

***TRIBUNE*, the chronically unsuccessful magazine of the labour movement (circulation under 3,000), is set to fold at the end of the month after a supposedly "crunch meeting" with its union backers collapsed into farce last week – like every other crunch over the past year.**

Despite being more than £100,000 in the red and with creditors demanding money, not enough union reps could be bothered to turn up to have a quorate board meeting. Editor Chris McLaughlin went purple with rage at his comrades, telling them that if a company had treated their members so disgracefully, they'd have called a strike. One board member left chortling that the magazine was "even more fucked than before".

Although owned by some of Britain's biggest unions, the general secretaries have refused to hand over any more money. Unite's Tony Woodley wants to see the magazine taken over into a union propaganda sheet, while the Communication Workers Union's Billy Hayes won't stump up because he "doesn't like the layout". The GMB's Paul Kenny, when approached for help, refused to step in after taking offence at an article. The irony of unions shutting down a company – having refused staff a pay rise for four years – seems lost on them.

If the magazine does get rescued, a new owner won't have to look far to make cuts. Deputy editor Keith Richmond has been reported to the NUJ after being caught plagiarising articles – including one he copied word for word out of well-known socialist rag the *Mail on Sunday*.

THEY'RE BANKING BRITAIN!

WITH the financial crisis and ballooning budget deficits set to hamstring public services for years, who better to get Britain back on its feet than the bankers and tax avoiders who got us into this mess in the first place?

Among Gordon Brown's new "business ambassadors" is Vodafone chairman **Sir John Bond**, who as HSBC boss until recently took the bank on an ill-fated venture into the US sub-prime market with the 2003 purchase of Household International. His current company remains locked in a £2bn battle in the European courts with HM Revenue and Customs following its efforts to avoid tax by diverting tens of billions in profits to the tax haven of Luxembourg.

Also batting for Britain will be Barclays chairman **Marcus Agius**, whose company's tax avoidance scheming is legendary. Such is Barclays' commitment to Britain that it wrote all its rip-off "payment protection insurance" policies through subsidiary companies in Dublin, where billions in profits would be taxed at 12 percent rather than 30 percent. Alas, the greedy bankers over-egged the scam and last year were forced to repay £300m to the British taxman.

Among the other bankers and consultants recruited to "promote the UK's excellence internationally" is Sainsbury chairman **Sir Philip Hampton**. His 2005 report for Gordon Brown recommended a bonfire of regulations and regulators of the sort that now look like they might be fairly necessary after all.

And no selection of the corporate great and good would be complete without **Lord Browne of Madingley**, forced to resign as BP chief executive last year over the small matter of lying to a court about his relationship with a male escort.

The Best of British indeed!

WISE COUNCIL

THE PM is also turning to a couple of old friends to bolster his new national economic council.

In comes the economic competitive minister **Baroness (Shriti) Vadera**, highly regarded for her ability to get things done. Alas, as one former official told a *Guardian* interviewer: "She gets things done, but what she gets done is sometimes very wrong". A reference perhaps to the tube PPP that the ex-UBS banker pushed through as Gordon Brown's favourite treasury special adviser.

Even post-Northern Rock, Vadera was unrepentant. "You can't wash away 10 years of having done the right structural things," she declared. Just the woman to confront the huge, er, structural problems now facing the economy.

Also drafted in is another of Gordon's stalwarts and new City minister, the ennobled Paul Myners (another businessman, like Digby Jones, bagging a life peerage for a job that might last a year).

Justifying the appointment, Brown's spokesman cited Myners' report on investment seven years ago, the main recommendation of which was easing the rules on investment in hedge funds and private equity. The upshot was a shot in the arm for the hedge fund industry, which has gone on to such great things as shorting HBOS shares.

Although Myners will have to resign as a director of GLG Partners hedge fund, he remains chairman of the Personal Accounts Delivery Authority through which the government aims to shovel as many people's pensions as possible on to the stock market of which he is a great fan. As he wrote to the chancellor in 2001: "I regard our strong funded pension system, our highly-developed equity culture and professionalisation of investment in the UK as key national assets". The "equity culture" was what drove Britain's banks to seek exponentially rising returns, by lending and borrowing as much as possible, to satisfy shareholder demands. The devastating consequences go beyond bank rescues. Last week's stock market collapse shafted the country's pension funds, too.

RESCUE REMEDY

WHO are the financial great and good at the Financial Services Authority who will help the Swiss investment banker-turned-FSA chief executive Hector Sants as he tries to clean up the City of London?

Alongside chairman **Lord (Adair) Turner**, himself vice-chairman in Europe of big-time sub-prime investor Merrill Lynch, sits his deputy **Sir James Crosby**. Although he escaped before the proverbial hit the fan last month, for five years until July 2006 Sir James was chief executive of HBOS as it pursued its over-leveraged business model and increasingly turned a traditional deposit taker into a corporate finance specialist, the strategy that now sees it on its knees.

Sitting on the FSA's crucial risk committee, meanwhile, is **Sir John Gieve**, the man who as permanent secretary at the home office not so long ago presided over such financial chaos that nearly £1bn couldn't be accounted for and who resigned as deputy governor of the Bank of England, where his brief was to keep an eye on the financial markets, in the wake of the Northern Rock collapse.

Heading the regulator's audit committee is non-executive director **Karin Forseke**. She was chief executive of Swedish investment bank Carnegie until 2006, during which time some of her traders were artificially inflating profits. Last year Sweden's financial regulator, also called the FSA, fined the bank around £4m and recommended that the entire board be replaced, describing "serious deficiencies that have existed in the governance and control of the bank's operations". Ms Forseke quickly resigned as the Swedish government's special adviser on privatisations. But, as events now show, that made her just the woman for British financial regulation.

AVOIDING THE ISSUE

CHANCELLOR Alistair Darling promises action on big City bonuses and dividends as conditions of the taxpayer-funded bank bail-out. But what about the nefarious activity that has long cost taxpayers more than either of these: rampant tax avoidance?

All the banks lined up for assistance from the taxpayer happily channel customers' money offshore, where tax can be reduced either through legal avoidance or, for the more cavalier, straightforward evasion.

In the past two years Barclays, HBOS, Royal Bank of Scotland, HSBC and Lloyds TSB have all been forced by a tax tribunal to hand over details of hundreds of thousands of customers' offshore accounts to the taxman because of strong evidence that a large number were being used for tax fraud. HBOS and Barclays (several times) have had artificial schemes to avoid their own tax bills exposed in recent years, while RBS was exposed last year as instrumental in helping Prudential seek to avoid tens of millions in tax through a highly contrived tax avoidance scheme.

So will the banks' taxpayer-funded rescue change their approach to tax avoidance and tax havens? The *Eye* put the question to the banks taking advantage of the bail-out and received the following answers:

Lloyds TSB: "[The bank] has never assisted customers to avoid tax liabilities and we worked with government in helping to shape the EU Savings Directive to counter tax avoidance. On its own account Lloyds TSB complies with all its statutory obligations in paying tax." (The savings directive is widely regarded as useless in this respect.)

HSBC: "We have no comment to make on how we manage that business."

Royal Bank of Scotland: "It is absolutely outrageous to suggest that RBS is using subsidiary companies in offshore locations for the purposes of tax avoidance. Through [RBS International] and Coutts we have substantial offshore banking operations in locations such as Jersey, Guernsey and the Cayman Islands for the use of corporate and wealth management customers and these businesses operate with the full approval of all the appropriate regulatory and tax authorities both in their own jurisdictions and in the UK."

For some reason **HBOS** and the country's most notorious tax avoider, **Barclays**, declined to comment.

As the RBS comment indicated, the one body that could do anything about the banks' tax avoidance and abuse of tax havens is the government. So will it use the best opportunity it will ever have to do so? Three calls to the treasury with the question went unreturned. The banks might be on the naughty step, but they look unlikely to have their favourite sweets taken away.

PYM'S O'CLOCK-UP!

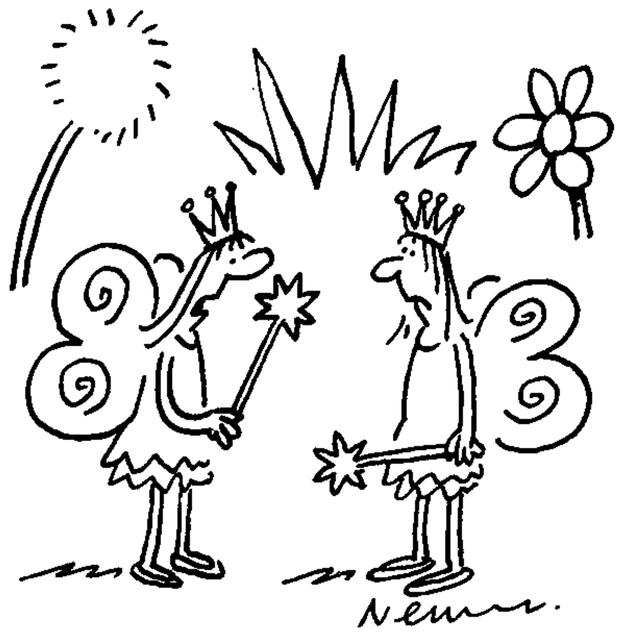
WHILE the world economy melted and the government scrambled to save the banks, last Wednesday was a good day to bury other bad bits of financial news.

So the record £7m fine for Alliance & Leicester for ripping off customers with its "payment protection insurance" was pushed well down the news agenda, even though the regulators declared: "The failings at A&L are the most serious we have found."

But who was responsible for the rip-off, which the Financial Services Authority found to have persisted for three years from 2005 to 2007? Step forward the chief executive for this period, Richard Pym.

Pym retired in July 2007 but a year later took over at the helm of Bradford & Bingley on a reported £3m package as it tried desperately to stay afloat. All efforts failed and two weeks ago the bank was nationalised. The treasury was unconcerned at Pym's record and had no qualms confirming that "the chief executive will continue to be Richard Pym".

Thus is one of Britain's two state-owned banks run by a committed financial services mis-seller who is now being paid millions by the taxpayer.



"If you don't believe in banks, they die"

"Bloody customers act as if they own the place!"

HOMES ON WHEELS

WITH house prices falling through the floor and repossessions soaring, who has Gordon Brown found to take over from Caroline Flint as housing minister? Step forward caravan enthusiast Margaret Beckett, the left-winger turned "safe pair of hands" party loyalist.

Beckett will need all her experience to make sense of a brief where New Labour contradictions are fast unravelling. The department for communities and local government is spending countless millions subsidising home ownership – make that negative equity – for people who can't afford to buy. But Beckett's real challenge will come when she explains what she's going to do to stop banks repossessing thousands more homeowners.

She can hardly blame the banks when their new owner is sitting opposite her at the cabinet table – especially since Northern Wreck has doubled its repossession rate since it became the first lender to be *nationalised*.

SAME OLD TORY STORY

IF THE Tories eventually take over from useless Gordon, how different will things be? Not very.

On page 19 of his "plan for a strong economy", shadow chancellor George Osborne quietly revealed who will be advising the party "on how the tripartite structure of financial regulation should be overhauled in order to improve financial stability". Er, step forward... Gordon Brown's recently-resigned "special representative for the promotion of the City", Sir James Sassoon!

Until 2002 Sassoon was a banker with Switzerland's venerable UBS (sub-prime write-downs now £23.9bn and counting). He only held his "special rep" position for 18 months before bailing out this September – just long enough to pick up a knighthood after his stint, from 2002 to 2005, as the treasury's managing director responsible for financial regulation, during which time the current problems were brewing nicely while the Financial Services Authority and treasury looked the other way.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Freedom can too easily turn into the idea that we all have the right to do whatever we want... That is libertarian, not Conservative..." – David Cameron, Conservative Party conference, 1 October.

"I am an instinctive libertarian..." – David Cameron, *Guardian*, 17 May 2002.

CALLED TO ORDURE

DAME Suzi Leather, one of New Labour's favourite quango queens, took a pasting from the elected grunts of the House of Commons. Dame Suzi chairs the charity commission and – with the encouragement of privately-educated class warrior Ed Balls – intends to stop some posh schools claiming charitable tax breaks. But how can this be done? Er, don't ask her!

Vain Dame Suzi, in devoré-style top and with a chic, feathered hairdo, radiated gushy self-satisfaction when she and colleagues arrived at Westminster's Portcullis House. She fixed the mainly middle-aged, male MPs of the public administration committee with a sultry smile, pulled her top tight and adopted a tone of husky subservience.

This only lasted a while, mind you. When the questions started getting tough, her veneer began to flake off and Dame Suzi was left gasping like a winded boxer.

The committee has numerous proud lefties – just the sort of people who might be expected to cheer an attack on public schools. Luton North's Kelvin Hopkins said the current charity tax perks enjoyed by independent schools were a case of "the rich wanting to buy a better education for their children at the expense of the taxpayer". But Hopkins feared Dame Suzi was being too "fuzzy" about her proposals.

The charity commission says private schools will have to "demonstrate public benefit". But what exactly does this mean? Sharing their games fields with local children and opening their music rooms to *hoi polloi*? Lending teachers to the local comp? Or will they perhaps agree to educate children with social problems?

It seems only fair that the likes of Eton and Harrow (not to mention less successful institutions) should have an idea of what they are supposed to do in order to keep their tax status.

Asked by the committee's chairman, Tony Wright (Lab, Cannock Chase), to cough up some firm proposals for this "public benefit" test, Dame Suzi flapped her hands and shrugged a svelte shoulder. "What do charities have to do?" begged Wright. "Are we going to know what you think?" Dame Suzi, by way of reply, could only waffle.

The commission's chief executive, Andrew Hind, talked about "eradicating" schools which do not take the public benefit test "seriously". "I want it absolutely at the front of their minds," said Hind, a bookish little man without much obvious sense of humour.

The main hint from the commission so far is that private schools could earn their public-hearted credentials by giving scholarships to pupils from the state sector. Paul Flynn (Lab, Newport West) was not impressed. He argued that bursaries could cream off the "pace setters" from state schools and thus do "enormous damage to local comprehensives".

Dame Suzi blinked. She and her team, using increasingly legalistic terms, mumbled about "advancing education". Wright, becoming itchy, told her she had to produce a firm idea of what "public interest" meant. Dame Suzi: "It's not for me to say." But of course it *is* for her to say. She and her buddies are going to be the very people making these decisions.

When Wright said scholarships could well be a bad idea, Dame Suzi gave a half-hearted defence. Wright: "Are you saying that the effect a private school has on the state school down the road is not something you will take into consideration?"

Dame Suzi, limply: "I don't think any of it is straightforward."

What a mess. The more the charity commission obfuscates and dithers, the more difficult it will be to judge which schools are "charitable" – and the more likely it becomes that private schools will appeal successfully against the commission's rulings. Indeed, who could blame them for doing so, given how badly Dame Suzi is running her show?

In a separate development, meanwhile, the commission appears to have become an outpost of MI5. Its executives told MPs that anti-terrorism scrutiny is now part of its remit and that a "special investigations" unit now monitors charities for signs of international money transfers and the usage of charitable monies for terrorist activities.

The commission's legal compliance officer, Kenneth Dibble, accepted that there were "very few cases where we're able to say definitely that money has been used for terrorist purposes" and accepted that there was "some difficulty in [acquiring] the evidential ability to prosecute". Clearly the macintosh and galoshes brigade are now well ensconced in the previously dusty world of charities.

'Gavel Basher'

RESHUFFLE UPDATE

NEW defence secretary John Hutton joins a ministry of defence on the verge of mutiny. This year's pay deal, due in August, still hasn't been put to the treasury and 1,500 MoD civil servants supporting frontline operations remain on the minimum wage of £5.73 an hour.

Hutton, who seven months ago lectured that "aspiration and ambition are natural human emotions", will surely sympathise. Or maybe not. The aspiration he so admired was to get rich, especially in the City. "So rather than questioning whether high salaries are morally justified, we should celebrate the fact that people can be enormously successful in this country," he said. "It would be a good thing for our country if there were more millionaires in Britain not fewer."

Just the man for a cash-strapped government department employing the government's lowest paid workers!

REWARDS FOR FAILURE

WILL the ministry of defence do the right thing and sack computer firm EDS for losing a hard drive that might (the MoD's not sure) contain the details of up to 100,000 forces personnel?

Don't bet on it. EDS has contracts to run defence personnel systems valued at £250m and to overhaul the entire defence IT system for around £4bn. Like the banks, EDS is now probably too big and too useless (and the government too dependent on it) for it to be allowed to fail.

HP HUMBUG

"SOME people have been asking why I haven't served my children up for spreads in the papers. And my answer is simple. My children aren't props; they're people."

– ***Gordon Brown***, *Labour party conference speech, 23 September*

"The PM has been meeting people all day. But when we walk into the living room of the flat 'above the shop', there is someone else waiting patiently for his help – a small boy wearing a pair of cartoon pyjamas. 'The wheel's come off,' says John Brown, five next week, handing over a Transformers car. 'Fix it, Dad.' Brown puts his jacket on the coffee table, where a stack of official papers are ready for tomorrow. Then, obligingly, he gets down on all fours on the carpet, his tie flapping, and searches for the missing wheel."

– ***Allison Pearson*** *interviews* ***Gordon Brown***, Daily Mail, *11 October*

TV

Stephen Fry in America (BBC1)

The American Future: A History by Simon Schama (BBC2)

Greatest Cities of the World with Griff Rhys Jones (ITV1)

AMERICAN election years have always been one of the most popular jollies for British news presenters, commuting business class across the Atlantic to use phrases like "the American dream" and a "heartbeat away" while standing in front of the Lincoln Memorial or on Florida promenades.

But the occurrence of a very rare race in which neither an incumbent president or vice president is running has greatly increased the media hysteria this time, even before Barack Obama became the closest politics has had to an Elvis, an American phenomenon about whom Europe is obsessed. So, as well as their Dimblebys, Edwardses and Snows, every network has despatched a showbiz figure to do a Michael Palin on the nation of Sarah Palin.

Stephen Fry in America is about as Palinesque (M) as it could possibly be: a big, jolly travelogue in which the national treasure aims to become an international treasure, rattling through all 50 states in a black London taxi cab. Because of post-Queengate panic at the Beeb over fakery in documentaries, Fry's opening voiceover explains that this is not the black cab he drives in London but a surrogate vehicle rented in the U.S. The presenter's irritation at having to make this pitiful disclaimer is audible but his voice soon recovers its booming, dictionary-stretching affability.

The problem with this show is simply arithmetical: 50 states in six one-hour episodes boils down to an average of six minutes per state but, given that territories as famous as California and Florida are bound to be given more, means that some places – Delaware, Maryland – are allocated less than a minute. So desperate is the pressure of time that even the longer sequences reduce a state to a single factor: gambling in New Jersey, the tea party in Boston and ice-cream in Vermont, where Fry gets to design his own Ben & Jerry's flavour.

Under the jaunty extracts from the American Songbook on the soundtrack, you can also hear the scrunch of BBC guidelines being trampled underfoot as Fry is not only regularly filmed plugged thoughtfully into his Apple laptop, but also chooses Apple's main designer to represent San Francisco when he comes to do that segment.

The American Future: A History by Simon Schama shares with Fry's series a fondness for stonking adverts for Apple products: the Prof is regularly pictured walking through airports or political conventional halls with his big silver lap-top, logo glowing outwards. Some viewers may also wonder if an academic who has so volubly endorsed Obama in articles and broadcasts this year should be presenting a four-part series that promises to look objectively at the challenges facing the next president. Perhaps it was fears over allegations of bias that led to Fry being encouraged, rather surprisingly, to endorse John McCain in publicity pieces for his series.

But, in fact, as usual with a Schama series, what is mainly being promoted is the professor himself. As with his previous histories of Britain and of Art, he eschews contributions from other experts, so the show essentially consists of an illustrated essay. But the only illustrations the director can easily find are shots of Schama in various poses: standing heroically on a hill at sun-set, striding along a dried-up river bed, wearing shades as he roars down a freeway in a car. Unfortunately, on this occasion the thesis being illustrated in this way is so sketchy that we're even more aware of the personality-cult stuff.

Schama throws out vague but booming phrases – "America has run out of infinity!", "This is a story of paradise lost!" – around which he hangs an incoherent lecture on the science of irrigation, the settlers of the west and documents from the department of agriculture. It's never clear what any of this is about except getting more shots of Schama on screen.

Greatest Cities Of The World With Griff Rhys Jones has a more global focus, although, as the middle conurbation in the trilogy is London, with locations within walking distance of Griff's home, there are suggestions that the budget has been tightly controlled. And, with more of the bad luck that currently afflicts ITV, someone thought it would be smart and topical to begin, on the brink of the US election, in New York.

As a result, the viewer keeps worrying that GRJ is going to bump in to Fry or Schama as he rushes around Manhattan with his trademark bonhomie, a quality that now feels rather bogus after Griff's recent big BBC2 documentary on his anger issues, itself a shadowing of Fry's award-winning two-parter for the same network on depression.

The locations are exactly what you'd expect – boat on the Hudson, Wall Street, Upper East Side social event and so on – while the script rattles through the traditional points: Manhattan an island, city that never sleeps, a city of extreme contrasts of wealth. The main diversion is imagining just how big Griff's anger problems would be after looking in *Radio Times* and seeing that Fry and Schama were making the same show in the same week.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

DESPITE being under orders to cut five percent from their budget, BBC News chiefs still saw fit to send presenters from London to cover the American financial meltdown. Huw Edwards of the 10pm news and Jim Naughtie of *Today* both flew to Washington to cover the vote in Congress over the $700bn bail-out on 3 October.

Were their journeys really necessary, given that the Beeb already has plenty of experienced hacks on the east coast? The main effect of Edwards's presence in Washington was that the news that Friday evening was forced to lead with the US bail-out vote, which had become a political formality in Washington by that time, instead of the more dramatic news about Gordon Brown's reshuffle and the resurrection of Peter Mandelson.

THE BBC announced last week that champagne was to be banned across the corporation because "it just doesn't feel right in the current climate". As a result, corks will not be popping at the HQ of wine merchants Majestic, who in the past five years have provided more than £255,000-worth of champers to the Beeb at an average of £29 per bottle, courtesy of the licence fee.

And who were the biggest boozers? Step forward *The Weakest Link*, which in 2006 downed £1,858-worth of champagne, four times as much as all 32 different language services based at World Service HQ Bush House managed to quaff. And since presenter and former alcoholic Anne Robinson has famously not touched a drop since 1978, that means someone is really putting the stuff away.

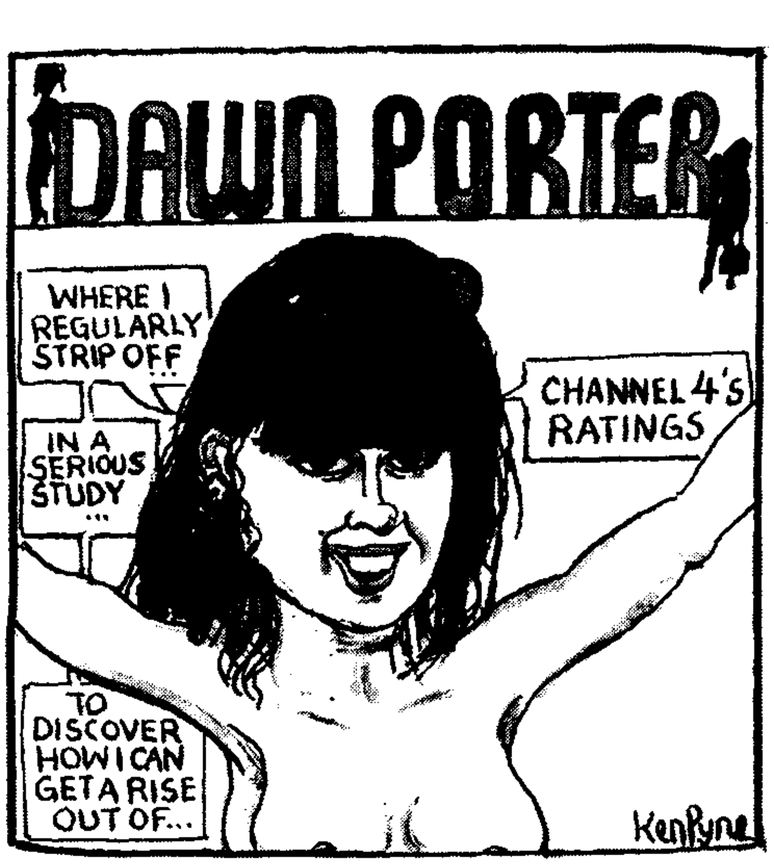
MORE sweeteners for BBC staff moving from London to Manchester have been revealed.

As well as a guaranteed house purchasing scheme, a relocation grant, cash to cover all legal fees and up to £9,000 for new furniture and curtains, staffers can now look forward to cheaper rail travel too.

"Virgin has sliced 15 percent off the standard London-Manchester fare for BBC staff. And they're offering first-class tickets between London and Glasgow for less than the cost of a standard," boasts *Ariel*, the BBC's in-house organ. "It's all thanks to crafty negotiation by our environmental team, as part of the plan to cut everyone's CO_2 emissions."

WHEN Jamie Oliver's *Ministry of Food* programme focused on overweight families who live on take-away burgers and kebabs in the South Yorkshire town of Rotherham, he took one of his subjects, the overweight Claire, to Rotherham district general hospital for a liver scan.

The aim was to show Channel 4 viewers what obesity does to the liver but it could equally have shown what is happening to the NHS under Labour. The film cut from outside the busy hospital straight to the consultant's room, missing the reception area – which the town's NHS trust has thoughtfully turned into a mini-shopping mall complete with a branch of Burger King!


DAWN PORTER
WHERE I REGULARLY STRIP OFF ...
IN A SERIOUS STUDY ...
CHANNEL 4's RATINGS
TO DISCOVER HOW I CAN GET A RISE OUT OF...
KenRyne

DUMB BRITAIN

Wogan's Perfect Recall, C4

Terry Wogan: In The Sound of Music, what age was Liesl going to be next birthday? She was 16 going on…

Contestant: Five.

The Weakest Link, BBC1

Anne Robinson: The Irish president, elected in 1990, who was the first to visit a British monarch, was Mary who?

Contestant: Mary Queen of Scots.

AR: In education, what is a formal cap worn by academics and also a piece of equipment used by bricklayers?

Contestant: Trowel.

AR: The point on a golf club or a tennis racket that gives the best contact is alliteratively known as the what spot?

Contestant: The g-spot.

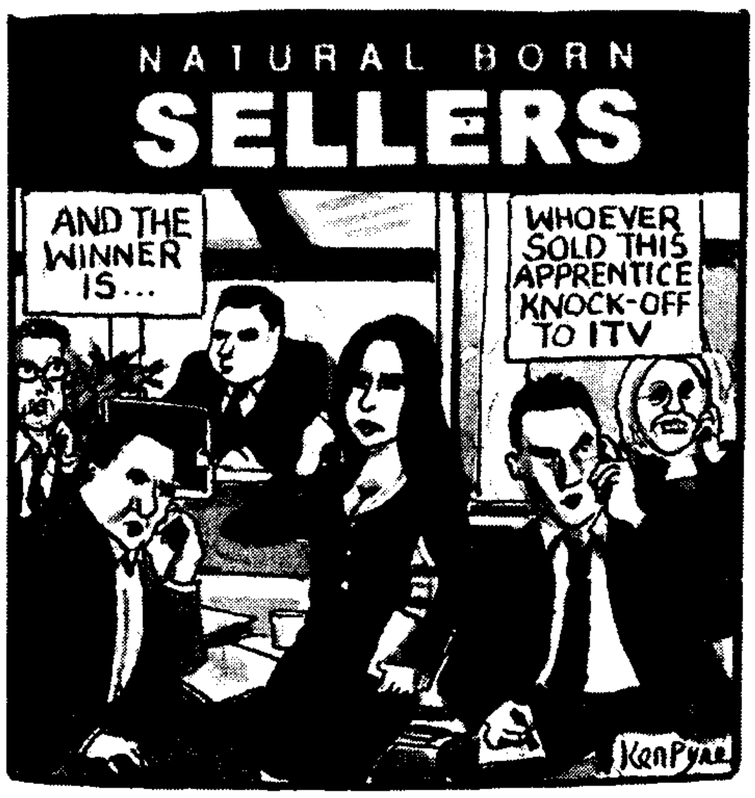
DON'T PANIC!

MARKET DATA - 17:02 UK

FTSE 100	3932.06▼	-8.85	-381.74%
Dax	4544.31▼	-342.69	-7.01%
Cac 40	3176.49▼	-266.21	-7.73%
Dow Jones	8213.36▼	-365.83	-4.26%
Nasdaq	1587.18▼	-57.94	-3.52%
BBC Global 30	4310.06▼	-275.62	-6.01%

Data delayed by at least 15 minutes

BBC website, 10.10.08



FOR the *Panorama* report *The Secret Policeman Returns*, the BBC gathered statistics from police forces on internal investigations against coppers, demonstrating the disproportionate numbers of black and ethnic minority officers facing investigation.

What a pity that whoever did the maths made an error a primary school child could have spotted. Rather than divide the number of investigations by the number of officers in order to get the number of investigations per officer, the programme got the numbers the wrong way round. The result, published on its website, was a table claiming that each and every black or ethnic minority copper in Nottinghamshire was facing 25.33 internal investigations, while a white cop in Lincolnshire faced 131. *Whoops!*

The error was spotted and "fixed", but rather than redo the maths properly (which would indeed have clearly shown that minority officers face many more investigations), the Beeb simply changed the table headings to the convoluted and somewhat unhelpful "number of white officers to one investigation" etc.

THE BBC has sent out a glossy brochure about its programmes for autumn, complete with a list of no fewer than 40 in-house publicists who are promoting these seasonal delights.

The publicity team may be about the size one would find in a Whitehall department, but it clearly isn't enough. The Beeb still feels the need to employ an external PR consultancy – Brown Lloyd James, run by Sir Nick Lloyd. This happy situation means the BBC uses the same PR firm as two of its greatest critics in the media, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*. Worth every penny, undoubtedly.

Shoplifter forgot she had TV under her arm

Wrexham Evening Leader

BIRTSPEAK 2.0

"ADVISER, AUDIENCES – ENGAGEMENT, BBC TRUST UNIT.

Working within the Audiences team, you'll develop and implement public engagement strategy including advising on external stakeholder relationships. In particular, you'll be responsible for advising on public consultation and developing e-engagement workstreams. You'll advise on appropriate levels of public involvement activities for a variety of Trust projects, have responsibility for delivering key components of audience engagement and ensure compliance with the Trust's engagement and consultations policies. You'll also be responsible for development and delivery of discrete audience-centric projects."

– Job advert

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

FINNISH amazon she may be, but Karita Mattila is one of the relatively few opera singers of either gender with the kind of body people might just want to ogle (in the interests of art, of course).

And bless her soul, she gives them every opportunity. One of her specialities is Richard Strauss's *Salome*, during which opera audiences across the world have enjoyed the spectacle of her unusually committed Dance of the Seven Veils – either in the flesh, as it were, or in the brief, blurred buttock-moment from a Paris staging we can all share in the comfort of our own homes courtesy of YouTube.

But alas, the added veil of censorship has intervened. Last weekend, Mattila was giving her all for *Salome* at the New York Met, where the new, populist regime run by Peter Gelb broadcasts many live shows to cinemas throughout the US. Late last week, Gelb decided that the sights afforded to his New York audience would be denied to everybody else. In the interests of maintaining the "family-friendly" values of Middle America, he announced that when it came to the money shot the camera would discreetly look away.

To his surprise, Middle America responded with a flood of angry blogs and emails. There was also robust speculation as to what view the camera might be offering while La Mattila peeled off. A close-up shot of the conductor's baton, quivering, seemed a popular alternative.

Meanwhile, an operatic censorship spat rages over here in Britain – though on more parochial and far less glamorous terms. Rose Bruford College is an educational establishment that specialises in the performing arts and offers, among other things, a "distance learning" course in opera studies. For this it charges serious money, mostly paid by students of mature years, and in return it promises a "teaching and administration staff of the highest quality".

But it's facing a revolt by students who don't think the quality is up to much, while matters have been made worse by the college's clumsy attempts to silence its loudest critics.

Angered by the poor standard of lectures at a recent opera-course "residential", one of the students gave chapter and verse in a college newsletter – with the result that the course director has declared a ban on comments of the sort in future editions, promising the removal of anything that may "bring the college into disrepute" or be "unhelpful to future relationships". Whatever that means.

The problem with mature students, though, is that they sometimes have more clout than their tutors. In this case the complaining student happens to be retired QC Anthony Graham-Dixon, father of a leading art critic and husband of a leading music PR with powerful connections in the opera world.

Graham-Dixon is refusing to be silenced, raising worryingly legal issues about free speech, while word is that the next "residential", scheduled for November, may be cancelled – partly due to lack of interest but also for fear of ugly scenes.

Whatever happens, you can bet the college won't be pushing Criticism as an option in its future programmes.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Cigarette packets to display graphic images of the dangers of tobacco

AD NAUSEAM

NEW ads for both Guinness and Haribo suggest that once again adland has been struck down with a nasty case of Cofti (Copied From The Internet).

In the case of Guinness, a spot celebrating the stout's 250th anniversary sees spandex-clad spacemen fired out of tubes into an array of drums and cymbals to create a rhythm. It bears a startling resemblance to Animusic's *Pipe Dream*, as a quick trip to YouTube will confirm.

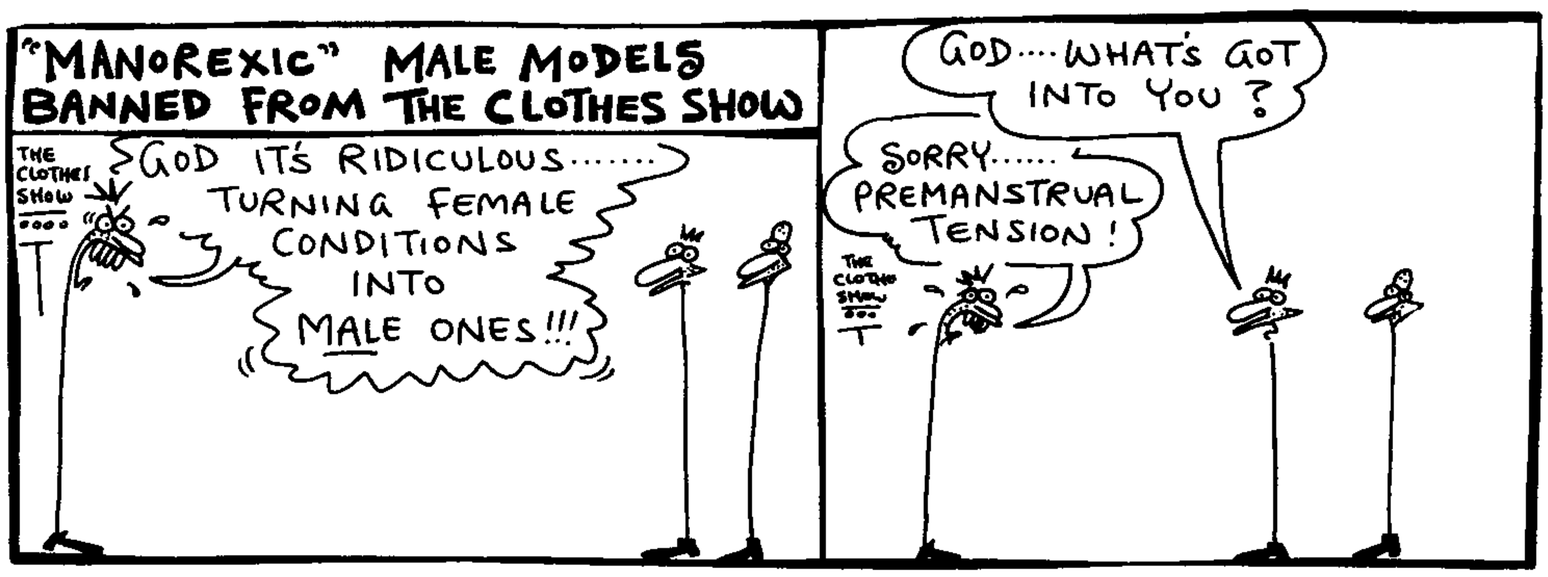
Haribo's new spot is an even more flagrant rip-off. It features a father being interrogated by his young daughter, trying to squeeze a confession from him about who ate all the sweets.

Anyone who has visited the actor Will Ferrell's Funny or Die website will recognise the skit – it was originally called *Good Cop, Baby Cop*, and as of writing it has received 8,977,133 views.

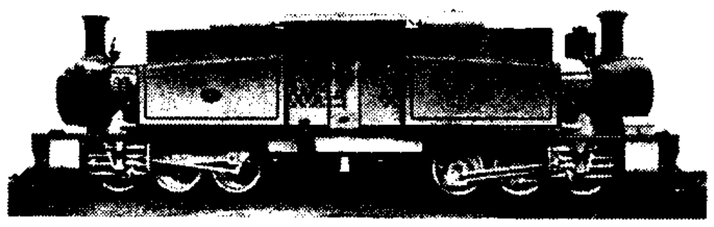
One of those, presumably, was from the creatives at Haribo's agency, Quiet Storm. As with Guinness and its agency, AMV BBDO, are the clients aware they are getting second-hand goods?

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


"MANOREXIC" MALE MODELS BANNED FROM THE CLOTHES SHOW
THE CLOTHES SHOW
GOD IT'S RIDICULOUS..... TURNING A FEMALE CONDITIONS INTO MALE ONES!!!
GOD.... WHAT'S GOT INTO YOU?
SORRY..... PREMANSTRUAL TENSION!
THE CLOTHES SHOW

SIGNAL FAILURES



Short-term pain

CAN credit-crunch Britain afford the extravagance of rail franchising? Yes, apparently it can.

Never mind that franchising inflicts short-termism on an industry with long investment cycles or that the contests for franchises cost taxpayers and passengers millions. Forget that franchises tie the railway into contracts that stifle innovation, produce fat profits in good times but attract bailouts in hard times to avoid scaring off the private sector. Ignore too the fact that even the department for transport (DafT) is now criticizing franchising in its response to the Competition Commission's finding that franchising policy puts up leasing costs for ex-British Rail trains (*Eye* 1217). Despite all this the department is still far too daft [sic] and stubborn to change course.

After the Competition Commission (CC) suggested giving franchise bidders more leeway, to make rolling-stock companies unsure if their trains will be leased (and therefore cut prices to compete), DafT responded that the companies could view the uncertainty as extra risk, "replacing simple monopoly pricing with pricing based on an exaggerated risk premium". Even that "simple monopoly pricing" is costly: leasing ex-BR trains costs up to 38 percent (£100m a year) more than in a "competitive market", DafT reckons.

The CC said: "Longer franchise periods of, say, 15 to 20 years may attract new entrants to the rolling-stock leasing market... or otherwise encourage a more innovative approach to rolling-stock deployment." But in response DafT denigrates the few long franchises Britain has seen so far, blatantly ignoring the same faults in short franchises. It argues that if the outgoing Tories had granted long franchises, train firms would now have accrued a "windfall" – not to be confused presumably with Stagecoach's windfall from its three-year South West Trains deal (*Eye* 1089).

"Long franchises have often failed to deliver the anticipated outcomes and in a number of high-profile cases have had severe adverse consequences for government," says DafT. "Longer franchises do not deliver value for money and can give rise to other problems including the risk of franchise financial failure or the need for government to intervene and renegotiate. This is shown by past experience of longer franchises, for instance Connex South Eastern, Virgin West Coast and Virgin CrossCountry." (At last, mandarins apparently admit that Richard Branson took them to the cleaners when renegotiating VWC; they proclaimed at the time a "better value deal for the taxpayer" while the *Eye* (1175) highlighted "enormous unplanned subsidy".)

In fact short franchises are just as shaky as "long" or "longer" ones. In early 2003 more than a third of franchises were on "management contracts" (revised deals eliminating private-sector risk). The failed Central Trains franchise overran agonisingly by three years.

DafT boasts about the franchises launched since it axed the Strategic Rail Authority in 2004, but they include First Great Western (remedial measures needed after two years of passenger misery) and GNER (financial failure after 18 months). DafT says: "By the end of the franchise periods, these franchises are expected to deliver total savings, compared to 2006-7, of £8.9bn." But mainly it's passengers, not franchises, who'll deliver those "savings" by paying much higher fares.

The CC and DafT have demonstrated that franchises, short or long, are poor value. But DafT still won't change course: it's now preparing a complicated new Southern franchise lasting under six years.

'Dr B. Ching'

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

EU leaders appear to be turning a blind eye to their own errors of financial judgement while calling for tighter controls and accountability in the financial market.

In particular, the EU "capital adequacy directive" of 14 June 2006 has been blamed by various financial experts for the current crisis in EU banking. The directive, which was eagerly adopted into law by the UK and other member states, implemented what was known as the Basel II Accord. This aimed to set out the minimum amount of capital that banks in the EU, the US and Japan should hold and what information they should reveal about their financial liabilities. But critics have described it as a bureaucratic nightmare which can make banks appear insolvent and so prevent them from lending to one another, causing the inter bank markets to seize up.

Professor Peter Spencer, of the Ernst & Young Item Club, commented last year: "If these funding routes are not reopened... it will make 1929 look like a walk in the park." Another expert, Professor Tim Congdon of Lombard Street Research, described the Basel rules as "hocus pocus". Nevertheless the European commission is now calling for a "College of Supervisors" for banking groups ignoring the root of the problem.

And that person is the taxpayer

WHILE the European commission and parliament call for more regulation, both remain strangely silent about their own abysmal accounts which the court of auditors has refused to approve for the fourteenth year running.

European commissioner for audit Siim Kallas told MEPs last month that an astonishing 11 percent of repayments to member states should not have been made. In Britain, meanwhile, the treasury failed to certify the accounts for the UK's "gross expenditure" on EU projects of £4.9bn. It said the commission would be able to sort it all out and taxpayers would just pay the difference. So that's all right then.

The EU auditors report, to be published on 10 November, criticized 17 areas in which there were "real and unquestioned weaknesses". These included rural development and structural funds, but the €12.4bn common agricultural policy was "particularly prone to errors".

How did the European parliament respond? It chose the same day to announce the launch of its €40m TV Europarl propaganda service which it hopes will "improve communications with the general public". Will it resolve the problem of the vanishing YouTube video of MEPs trying to sign up for their daily allowances at 7am ready to leave with packed suitcases, filmed by Austrian MEP Hans Peter Martin? Don't bank on it.

COMMUNICATION with the European public might improve of course if MEPs did not keep voting for undemocratic moves that remove people's basic legal rights.

They did so again last month with a fast-track extradition treaty that allows trials to go ahead in absentia and without proper evidence thanks to the European arrest warrant (EAW).

Despite warnings from the German Federal Bar Association and the European Criminal Bar Association, MEPs voted by 609 votes to 60 (14 abstentions) to approve the law before it goes to the council of ministers. Fair Trials Abroad and Liberty say it is a violation of basic rights and may challenge it in the European court of human rights.

The latest victim of the EAW is 19-year-old British student Andrew Symeou, who faces extradition to Greece on manslaughter charges (see *Eye* 1217). This is despite the lack of evidence against Mr Symeou and statements from witnesses that his name was only obtained after police assaulted them and forced them to sign false statements in Greek without access to a lawyer or consular representative.

When Mr Symeou appeared before Westminster magistrates last month, the court heard of a catalogue of abuses of human rights by Greek police and abuse of due process by Greek magistrates, including failure to issue a summons and the delay of almost a year before issuing a warrant. Judge Purdy said: "The European Arrest Warrant scheme is still in its infancy and depends on respecting the rule of law... Laganas police are not respecting the rule of law and the respondent should not be sacrificed on the altar of EU harmony."

If Mr Symeou is extradited, he could remain in a Greek prison for 18 months without charge or trial, even though the "investigation" into his case took one day and was described by defence counsel John Jones as a "whitewash".

Judge Purdy will give his decision at the end of the month.

ECO-GNOMICS

Flying into trouble

DEVELOPING and demonstrating a credible environmental position is now vital for any organisation. Failure to do so can damage corporate reputation, depress share prices and alienate clients and customers."

So says financial PR firm Citigate Dewe Rogerson wisely, adding the important caveat: "Gaining media coverage and recognition for environmental success is, however, challenging.

The search for green credibility can indeed be challenging. Especially for emerging companies like Jet Republic, described as a "new boutique private airline" that aims to be "the most desirable private club in the sky". The airline has ordered 110 Learjet aircraft and says it plans to fly to more than 1,000 airports in Europe.

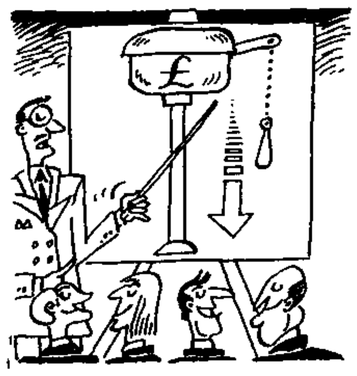
The airline also makes the extraordinary claim that its operations will be "carbon neutral" from its very first flight, listing a handful of projects it will invest in through a "small hourly contribution", built into its fees.

Quite how a massive explosion of private 7-seater jet routes across Europe can be described as carbon neutral remains a mystery. But doubtless Jet Republic will take advice on this and other important environmental issues from its newly hired PR firm... Citigate Dewe Rogerson!

"They forgot their baby"

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

CRISIS OF CRAPITALISM



IT WASN'T only bad luck that led more than 100 British councils to invest nearly £1bn in dodgy Icelandic banks – more than ten times the amount lost by local authorities in the wake of the collapse of the fraudulent BCCI bank in 1991.

Councils didn't just pour their taxpayers' money into Landsbanki and others after seeing an ad in *Money Mail*, filling out a form and hoping for the best. As supposedly responsible stewards of public funds they took the advice of UK government-approved financial advisers, such as Sector Treasury Services Ltd, "the leading provider of treasury management, risk and capital financial advisory services to UK public service organisations".

In its September credit-ratings bulletin, Sector reclassified Landsbanki under "negative outlook" for long-term deposits, but advised that the bank was a good bet for "short-term maturities". Many councils regularly move money in and out of these 30-day deals because they deliver relatively high rates of interest without the dosh being tied up for long periods.

One small Scottish council, Moray, trusted Sector's advice and in mid-September put £2m into Landsbanki on a 30-day maturity deal. The council now fears it won't see it again. Others are likely to be in the same boat.

So who are these wise advisers on whom councils rely to help them safely invest millions on our behalf? "Sector is part of Capita Group plc," it says in very small print at the bottom of their stationery. Oh fuck, as they say in finance departments up and down the land.

● INSTEAD of relying on Crapita for their information, perhaps council finance chiefs should have paid more attention to the newspaper business pages. Stories such as: "Is Iceland heading for meltdown? A Northern Rock-style crisis is threatening its entire banking system". That one, by the prescient Iain Dey, appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* as far back as 3 February.

Alternatively, councils could have learned from the BCCI experience. Wigan council, for instance, lost £2m in BCCI but had no money in Iceland. Similarly, Western Isles council, which lost a whopping £24m with BCCI, had no money in foreign banks.

One of the few councils to have lost money in both scandals was Tory Westminster (see below), which had £1.5m in BCCI. The council's leader at the time was Dame Shirley Porter, who never could resist the allure of a quick buck.

PAUL'S CRYSTAL BALL

WESTMINSTER city council is £17m to the bad in the wake of the Iceland affair – and that's on top of around £6m lost earlier this year on investments in Lehman Bros, HBOS and AIG.

One man who has been telling the Tories "I told you so" is the council's Labour group leader Paul Dimoldenberg. At a meeting of the council's Conservative-dominated resources overview and scrutiny committee on 18 September *last* year – just after the Northern Rock scandal broke – Dimoldenberg spoke strongly against a Tory proposal to invest hundreds of millions in taxpayers' money in "adventurous" and "creative" ways.

He pointed out that the council's previously cautious approach had served the people of the borough well – in the five years up to 2006-07 the authority had earned £82.4m in interest at an average return of 4.5 percent. This wasn't good enough for the Tories, however, who insisted that finance officers should seek "ways in which returns could be maximised". Eight percent or more was the target. The rest is history.

Oh well, at least the Tory who was in charge of Westminster council at the time, Shirley Porter protégé Sir Simon Milton, isn't around any more. He's deputy mayor of London now. Oh fuck again. Don't let him play with *your* piggy bank, Boris!

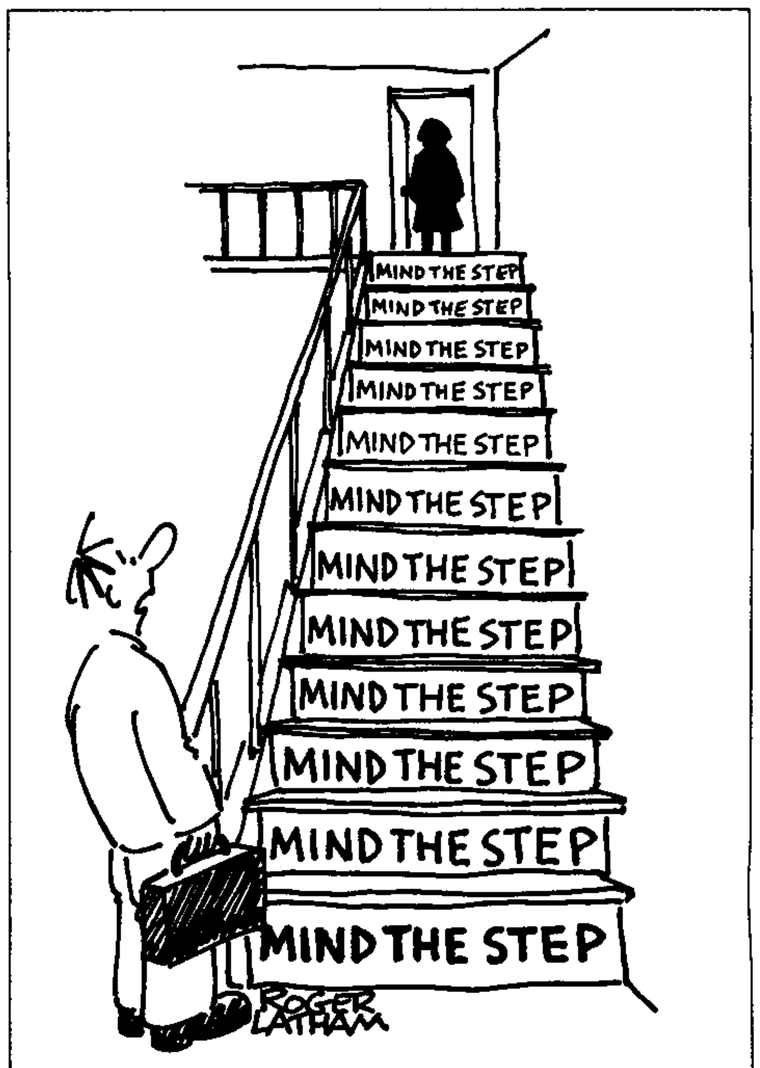
DONNY DEJA VU

WHEN times are hard, the people running Doncaster council know what to do. We don't mean the £3m they invested in dodgy Icelandic banks. Any fool can do that. No, at Donny they have a piss-up, courtesy of the taxpayer.

The excellent *Doncaster Free Press* was curious about why the council had spent nearly £6,000 on four "hospitality" days at Doncaster racecourse this summer. Who had been so royally entertained by watching the gee-gees with Martin Winter, the Labour mayor, the paper inquired? Donny council, of course, refused to say. You can't have taxpayers knowing who is being entertained with, er, taxpayers' money, can you? Happily the enterprising *Free Press* got hold of the guest list anyway.

Mayor Winter invited 100 of the great and good from across Yorkshire, as well as senior council officers. Prominent among the guests in July was Terry Bramall, former chairman of Doncaster-based housebuilder Keepmoat, who sold his family's stake in the firm last year for £563m. Allen Hickling, the firm's MD, had attended in June.

The September do was graced [*shurely "disgraced" – Ed*] by former councillor leader Gordon Gallimore, who in 1997 was criticised by the district auditor's report into the Donnygate scandal for accepting £1,000 in travel vouchers from, er, Keepmoat, whose boss Bramall had grown rich on the business put his way by Doncaster council. And the place where bent councillors drank their way through the 1980s and 1990s at the expense of developers was, of course, the private bar at Doncaster racecourse. It's quite like old times in the Beacon of Sleaze!



"How did it go at the risk assessment course?"

CONCRETE JUNGLE

NURSERY Row park in Southwark, sarf London, is one of the few places children can play outdoors in an area consisting mainly of dense social housing with few private gardens. It is also a rare 4.5-acre pocket of bio-diversity in that well-known oasis of nature, the Elephant & Castle.

Last year the council's parks department carried out a £300,000 refurbishment using money from funds including "Safer Stronger Communities" and "Cleaner Greener Safer" to improve the safety of the park. Shrubs were removed to improve sightlines, passages were widened and a large wildflower meadow was created. Fifteen years ago residents had planted a community orchard and wildlife hedge. This year, as it began to reach maturity, they added olive, fig, loquat and apricot trees to reflect the cultural diversity of the multi-ethnic population.

In spite of all this safe, green, strong, clean etc stuff going on, unbeknown to local residents, part of the park had been quietly reclassified as an "early housing site". There is a desperate need for more housing in the area, especially since, under the Elephant regeneration scheme, thousands of residents must be decanted from the nearby Heygate Estate while it is redeveloped.

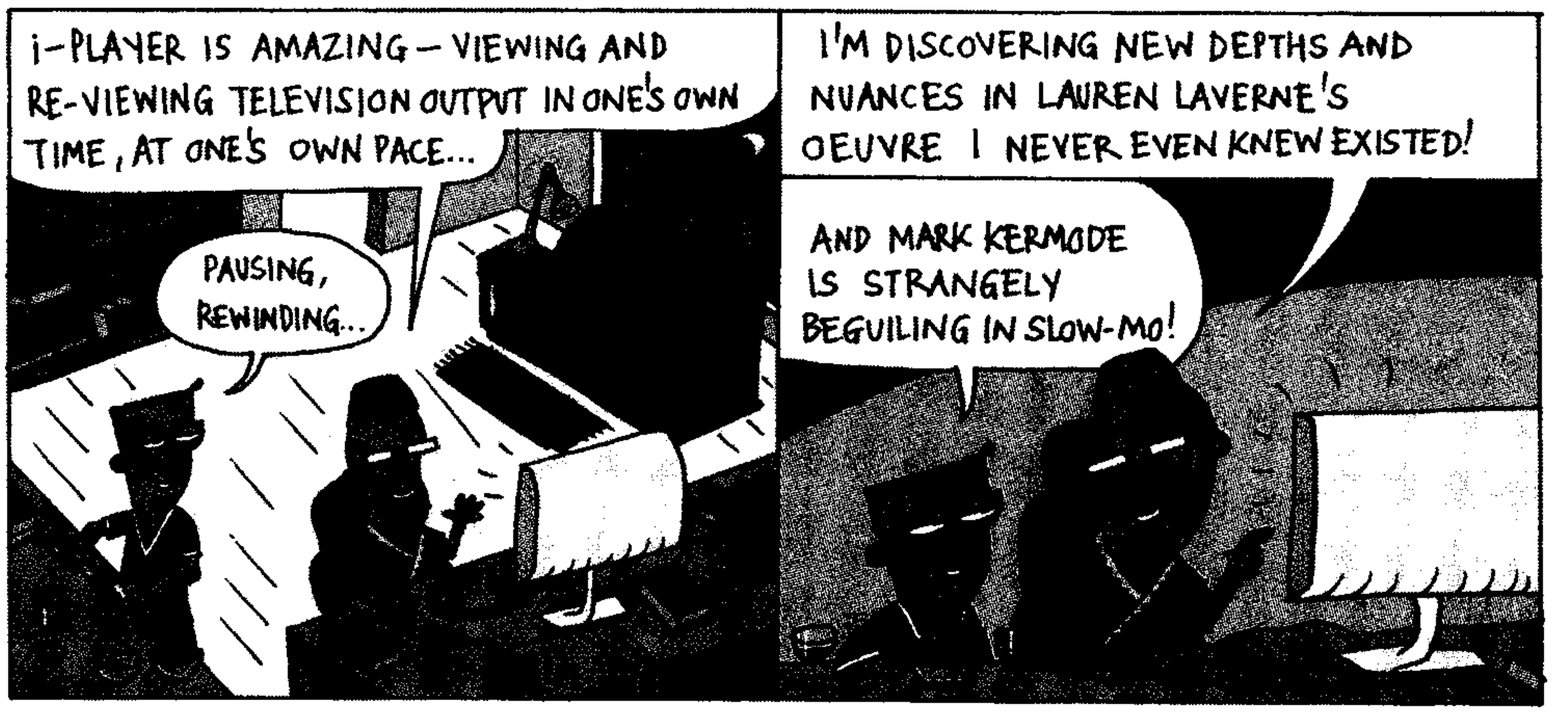
In order to "increase the quality and quantity of open spaces", several 10-storey housing blocks are to be built on the park, covering nearly a fifth of it. Access will be via alleyways – sorry, landscaped pathways – between these tall buildings, meaning that last year's expensive lessons about sightlines and wide access routes providing a feeling of safety will have been thrown away. The community orchard and wildlife hedge – the most bio-diverse and appreciated parts – will be destroyed. The new wildflower meadow will be in the shade below the cliffs of the new buildings and may not survive.

To mitigate the loss of a fifth of the park, housing associations wishing to run the new buildings will be assessed "on the quality of their community regeneration proposals" and expected to show "commitment to physical, economic, social and environmental sustainability". Just don't mention tree-planting.

● QUOTE of the week, from a Mendip district council report: "Environmental health officer Keith Horton said: 'It has been long recognised that the [Glastonbury] festival site is host to a very significant amount of acoustic energy and inevitably there will be some community impact.'"

Translation: Residents have complained about the noise.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


i-PLAYER IS AMAZING – VIEWING AND RE-VIEWING TELEVISION OUTPUT IN ONE'S OWN TIME, AT ONE'S OWN PACE...
PAUSING, REWINDING...
I'M DISCOVERING NEW DEPTHS AND NUANCES IN LAUREN LAVERNE'S OEUVRE I NEVER EVEN KNEW EXISTED!
AND MARK KERMODE IS STRANGELY BEGUILING IN SLOW-MO!

NOOKS and CORNERS

MORE on the long-running saga of the extraordinary St Mark's Church in North Audley Street, Mayfair, which the diocese of London in its wisdom was prepared to see converted into a Garfunkel's hamburger joint back in 1986 (*Eye* 644).

After the American Church was turfed out (the US embassy is close by), St Mark's was declared redundant in 1974. Even though the Americans, and others, wanted to buy it, the diocese was determined to maximise its profit on the empty and now neglected building, hence the burger proposal it was keen to consider.

St Mark's North Audley Street is no ordinary church. Listed at grade I, it is a remarkable Greek Revival building designed by J.P. Gandy-Deering and built in 1825-28 as a chapel-of-ease to St George's Hanover Square. In 1878, the interior was given a sumptuous makeover by Arthur Blomfield, who was responsible for the arcades and elaborate open timber roof. All this is intact, although the diocese continued to neglect the building while considering yet more unsuitable schemes after the burger proposal fell through.

In fact St Mark's is not really redundant as, since 1994, it has been used by the Commonwealth Christian Fellowship, a free evangelical church, which has cleaned and repaired the building and installed new heating. This congregation now flourishes. The diocese, however, remains determined to make a killing out of this valuable Mayfair site and has given the fellowship notice to quit by 17 October, despite earlier promises that it could stay until the planning process for a new use had been completed. It certainly has not been, as Westminster city council has yet to determine whether the diocese's current wheeze – turning the church into a sort of spa and beauty salon – is an acceptable change of use.

In 2003, the diocese co-operated with the council and English Heritage to prepare a planning brief for what was described as "one of the finest churches in Westminster". This stated that a priority was to retain St Mark's as a place of worship, and the diocese undertook to use the brief in marketing the building. However, the following year the diocese's agents, Messrs Biscoe Craig Hall, advertised St Mark's for sale almost secretly – with a single A4 sheet. And in 2005 the favoured purchaser was revealed to be George Hammer's Hammer Holdings, a car-park operator and security firm.

Mr Hammer's other ventures include the Sanctuary in Covent Garden and he proposed turning St Mark's into a "Wellness Centre". To facilitate this, the Church Commissioners approved an amended redundancy scheme in 2006 and the following year Hammer made his application for planning permission and listed building consent. Two elements in this – residential accommodation and a restaurant at the back in Balderton Street – had to be withdrawn following protests, but what is proposed still requires conversion of the sanctuary into a "relaxation" area, making a side chapel into a "relax" area and the building of a therapy pool above the narthex.

There is strong opposition from local residents and traders. But is it necessary to spoil St Mark's at all? The government's planning policy guidance (PPG) paper 15 states: "The best use will very often be the use for which the building was originally designed, and the continuation or reinstatement of that use should certainly be the first option when the future of a building is considered." The diocese won't say what other bids it has received, but it is known that the Agora Trust made an offer in 2004 and proposed using the building for "community/ venue/worship purposes". The evangelical empire of Holy Trinity Brompton has also expressed strong interest.

What is clear is that for more than 30 years, the diocese of London has only been prepared to consider schemes which might make lots of money. Given the recent remarks of the archbishops of Canterbury and York regarding the morality of the capitalist system, when contemplating the behaviour of the diocese over St Mark's, motes and beams come inevitably to mind.

AND what of the nearby US embassy itself in Grosvenor Square? Once it was a friendly place with a library where outsiders could read about American history and culture. But no more. Conscious of being hated and the subject of attack, the US government tried to move the embassy, at first without success. Who, after all, would want it as a neighbour? Then it proposed altering the building to make it more defensible by mutilating its exterior. That would be wrong. For unpopular and unfashionable though the embassy now seems, it has a commanding presence in a drearily pompous square and is rather distinguished. Ignore the big eagle: this late Fifties building, with its richly textured repetitive façade, designed by the great Finnish-American architect, Eero Saarinen, is a fine example of Pop-Modern.

The US government has just announced that it is to build a new embassy over the river in Nine Elms near Battersea. The architect will be chosen by international competition and the building, we're told, will help "revitalise" this part of south London. Some hope! As an introverted fortress behind defensive walls, it will be even more hideous than the surrounding warehouses and merely blight this innocent part of the capital.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Every year now, the same outrageous and shocking display!
It's an affront to our civilised values!
EXIT
TATE BRITAIN
TURNER PRIZE EXHIBITION 2008
They should do Something about these Stuckists!
What do we want? Figurative painting! When do we want it? Now!!

Letter from **Manama**

from Our Own Correspondent

NO BOOZE, no sex, no smoking or snacking in the street. If you thought the island of Bahrain was dull, try it during Ramadan.

This year was even quieter than usual. Lest anyone be suspected of having a good time last month, our government bowed (again) to the Islamist hardliners in parliament and introduced a new law imposing a one-year jail sentence on anyone caught doing so much as chew gum in public.

For the 40-odd percent of non-Muslim expats, here for an easy tax-free lifestyle, this was trying. But for the rest of us Bahrainis the holy month was a welcome respite from the usual bacchanalia. Come the festival of Eid, and our beautiful island was again invaded by playboys roaring in their thousands over the causeway linking us to mainland Saudi Arabia.

They came, as they always do, for the bars, brothels and gay massage parlours that throng downtown Manama. For beneath the fig-leaf of Islamic law, we are Saudi Arabia's dirty little secret: a safe zone where Saudi yoof can burn off some steam. And boy do they burn. Many of us refuse to drive at weekends for fear of the drunken teenagers in pimped sports cars plying our highways.

Why won't our government act? Perhaps because tourism is so important – and because 5.8m of our 7.4m foreign visitors last year came from Saudi. Also, if the Saudi authorities really disapproved, we'd know. We are, after all, little more than a vassal state. Two thirds of our GDP - about $10bn – comes from oil exports, which is a miracle given that most of our own oil ran out decades ago. The local refinery now does a roaring trade with crude from guess where!

Not that your average Bahraini sees any of the income from this. Despite a fairly respectable per-capita GDP of $21,000, many Bahrainis are still dirt poor. Some villages have no running water or sewerage systems. Oddly, these areas are Shia while our ruling class is Sunni.

Enter prime minister Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, the Robin Hood of Bahrain. Not only does "Mister Ten Percent" take a slice of any foreign investments, but sometimes he even builds a housing estate named after him. His arch-rival and our future monarch, Crown Prince Salman Al-Khalifa, our very own "pro-western liberal reformist", showed his colours meanwhile by selling a large chunk of our northern offshore territory to developers. Our PM of 37 years happens to be his great uncle.

So what hope for democracy? Well, we have a tradition of dissent, as shown last December when we celebrated national day with riots. Interior ministry goons put that one down with sufficient force to create a Shia martyr out of bystander Ali Jassim Makki.

Otherwise we have given up on the political process. Shortly after it was submitted to parliament in 2006, a report of a government conspiracy to suppress the Shia and rig elections was itself suppressed and its author, British-born Saleh Al Bandar, deported. We hoped Washington, which received a copy, might intervene. But no: Bahrain is a "beacon of democracy", said Condoleezza Rice.

Oddly we are also home to the US Fifth Fleet, and the US has it on good authority (from the Khalifas) that our Bahraini Shia could constitute an Iranian fifth column. So much for their chances of gaining political representation.

Meanwhile we resolved a territorial dispute with our other rich neighbour, Qatar, and to celebrate are building another causeway. This will join us to the Qatari peninsula – a country that shares Saudi Arabia's strict Wahabi brand of Islam but is also home to lots of young men with money. Some of our cruder expats are calling this the Bahraini "spit-roast". If only they were wrong.

Letters

Cheap frights

Sir,

I refer to the attached advertisement [see right] that appeared in issue 1218, entitled "Cheap Frights with Ryanair".

This advertisement breaches Ryanair's trademark given that Private Eye received no authorisation to use our trademark.

In order to avoid legal proceedings for this breach, we call on Private Eye to make a £1,000 donation to the charity ORBIS Ireland, a charity sponsored by Ryanair.

I look forward to your confirmation by return that you will make this contribution in order to resolve this matter.

Yours sincerely,
JIM CALLAGHAN,

Director of Legal and Regulatory Affairs, Ryanair.

● *Mr Callaghan is referred to the Eye's reply in the famous case of Arkell v. Pressdram (1971). Ed.*

Paice setter

Sir,

I feel I must write in defence of Professor Elisabeth Paice (Medicine Balls, 1220). Having worked as her PA for several years in the 1990s, I know her to be entirely committed to the support and welfare of junior doctors and passionate about improving their working conditions and opportunities. She is certainly not petty or vindictive.

Dame Carol Black may or may not be a shit, but Dr Mackay is clearly an idiot. I mean, how many degrees do you need to recognise that abusing a senior colleague, in writing, in a public forum, is a bad idea? Quite apart from being unprofessional, it shows such poor judgement that I'm glad I'm never likely to be his patient, and surely Prof Paice and her colleagues were quite right to address it.

If I'd been caught doing something so foolish, I'd be keeping very quiet about it, not whingeing to Private Eye about how badly I'd been treated.

Yours faithfully,
REBECCA ROOUM,

Warwick.

"On me 'ead, son!"

Ratbiter bitten

Sir,

Having just read your latest missive from Ratbiter on Alex Salmond (Eye 1219) I am wondering what Private Eye is coming to?

When Ratbiter attended the launch of the SIF was she (or is it a he?) wearing magic Islamaphobia spectacles which had every women wearing a Taliban style burqa? For if he'd taken them off he may have noticed those prominent "supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood" Annabel Goldie, leader of the Scottish Conservatives, and Pauline McNeill, Labour's then Scottish Justice spokesperson.

And the reach of the Muslim Brotherhood is far more frightening than I realised with Scotland's Cardinal Keith O'Brien also welcoming its launch.

Since devolution it has been surprising – what with another layer of politicians to harry – that your Scottish coverage has been declining both in quantity and quality. If you carry on at this rate of misleading journalism you'll have to be reporting yourself in the "Street of Shame".

I await Ratbiter's next article when he tells us weapons of mass destruction are still in Iraq since he seems so keen on believing Labour press officers without question or basic journalistic research.

WILLIAM KELLY,

Glasgow.

Sir,

I find Stephen Maxwell's support for Alex Salmond confusing (Eye 1220). Does the timing of reporting matter? In the goldfish bowl of Scottish politics perhaps he shows too much deference to his political master?

Salmond has enjoyed an unchallenged time as First Minister and will cosy up to anybody that will give him a majority in the Scottish Parliament that he so desperately seeks. I commend Ratbiter's article (Eye 1219) highlighting the hypocrisy of Salmond's administration. I look forward to more exposés of a man whose legacy to my country would be a divisive local income tax, make us believe that North Sea Oil is bountiful and the panacea to the nation's fortunes and implement a strategy for power generation that can only lead to the lights going out.

Keep up the excellent work.

JOHN FINDLAY,

Scotland.

Sir,

I'm not sure those who control BBC Scotland can be described correctly as 'Kelvinside numpties' ('Ratbiter' Eye 1219). The august organization is no longer based in Queen Margaret Drive and is now found on the banks of another river. Thus the appropriate term its controllers should be 'Clydeside numpties'.

Yours,
BRIAN HOGG,

Via email.

Lima lament

Sir,

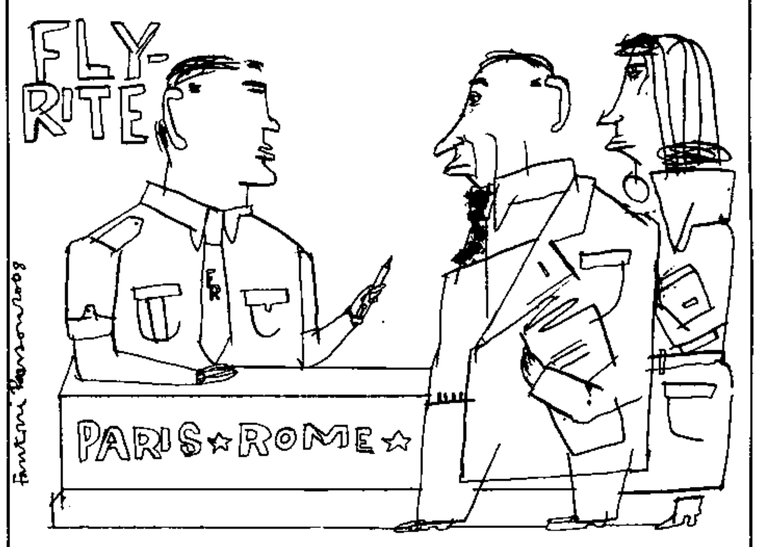
Re Letter From Lima, Eye 1218.

Vladi bribing senators? Wonder what the point of that was – Peru hasn't had a senate since the current constitution came on line in December 1993 and congress went unicameral. And "Fujimori's successor, Toledo"? Shame to overlook the caretaker presidency of Valentín Paniagua – only lasted eight months, and he probably lacked the Machiavelli factor to be successful over a full term, so perhaps one of the best presidents Peru never had.

HAYDN RAWLINSON,

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Our financial position is really dodgy right now. If I were you, I'd book with another airline"

Energy boost

Sir,

When you described Energy Watch as useless etc (Eye 1220)... you made an error.

On a one-to-one basis they were great and helped me on more than one occasion when I was being screwed by energy companies. Energy Watch were prompt and quickly sorted things out.

In terms of making energy companies change their rip off policies, you have Ofgem that has 10 board members, four of whom and two advisers (and they only have two) were involved in the privatisation of utilities.

They have just released their report that has taken seven months (we could have told them in a day).They point out most people are happy with the energy companies, and I suppose that if you say a lie most will believe it. They say we are being ripped off a bit (A BIT?).

But when are they going to act? Will it be after winter and a few more dead people?

As for Mr Wicks the energy minister, he is useless and cannot even answer letters and it would seem BERR do not wish me to make a complaint about his conduct as an MP, as Paula Lovett has not bothered to get back to me. It stinks.

Yours sincerely,
MR SANDERS,

Via email.

Pool cue

Sir,

Re: Broomhill Pool and others (Nooks & Corners, 1220). Twelve years ago Sport England made a policy decision not to give any more grants to open-air pools. This effectively gave councils all over the country the green light to demolish and sell off outdoor pools and lidos, secure in the knowledge that there would be no objection from the DCMS.

Furthermore, this enabled New Labour to attain their real objective, which was to facilitate the growth of private health clubs: henceforth, open air swimming would mainly become the province of those who could afford a monthly subscription.

Only approx 100 open air pools are left in Britain and apart from Broomhill several more are currently under threat.

Throw in the destruction of school pools under the Building Schools for the Future programme, (many of which are outdoor pools) and Labour's plan to disenfranchise its traditional voters from an open-air swim is going just... er, swimmingly!

Yours sincerely,
SALLY WAINMAN,

Via email.

Bitter taste

Sir,

When Slicker (Eye, 1220) talks of 'Andre Mosimann's restaurant in Mayfair', could he possibly mean Anton Mosimann's private dining club in Belgravia? Minor inaccuracies affect credibility and make one rather hesitant to accept the conclusions of an important investigation.

Yours &c,
SIMON BRYDEN-BROOK,
London SW1.

Lunchtime O'Claptrap?

Sir,

Far be it from me to defend Jude Kelly and her "feeble" production of Oz (Eye 1220, p. 12), but I did attend a matinee on 3 August and sat in the (admittedly less than half full) balcony. I should also say that the children with me (aged 11 and 8) enjoyed themselves, and the performers (R. Hudd, A. Cooper et al) could not be faulted.

LEN WILSON,
Beckenham, Kent.

Brick line

Sir,

Reading your Literary Review (Eye 1219), I couldn't help noticing the remarkable resemblance between Paul Auster's character Brick, who must step out of his narrative to assassinate his author, and Brick, the protagonist of Gene Wolfe's The Last Thrilling Wonder Story who had much the same mission in 1982. Of course, there's no chance of their being related, as Auster is a celebrated literary figure, wheras Wolfe is only a science-fiction writer, which is why I'm having to tell you about him. Still, it's nice to see mainstream literature catching up in the matter of formal experimentation after only a quarter of a century.

Yours faithfully,
GODFREY MARRIOTT,
Via email.

Gobble De Gook?

Sir,

Your nameless book reviewer (Literary Review: Why oh Wyoming, Eye 1219) contends that "People... are just not called Forrie Winkta, Chauncy Mellowhorn, Fenk Fipps, Mizpah Fur..." etc. Perhaps the effect of having a PM so mundanely named as Gordon Brown has made him shut his eyes to the very real names I have collected (when no one was looking) over the years: Bubbers, Critty, Fenstergucker, Footit, Hefelfinger, Hurlbut, Krumpendorf, and Longknecker, to name but a few. These are not even lawyers' firms, these are real people.

Yours faithfully,
PODGOOP SPANGLEPOPP,
Via email.

Channel hopping

Sir,

Interesting to note the implicit sneer in your Media News item (Eye 1220) on the new Gaelic channel. Yes, we are few in number, but given the history of public policy towards the language for well over a century, the miracle is that we are still here.

Not only that but this tiny community continues to produce award-winning poets, novelists, makers of films and television programmes the equal of anything being produced by the metropolitan mainstream.

The fact is Gaelic has survived despite a history that has ranged from active oppression to a less than benign neglect.

Given that there have been apologies to indigenous populations, for past cultural cruelties, with some gestures of restitution, in a number of Britain's former colonies, the cash being invested in Gaelic television (a tiny fraction of that spent on multi-channel English broadcasting) should be seen as the beginning of reparations for all the damage done.

Mark Thompson was right to welcome BBC Alba as "our newest baby".

Cheap at the price.
leis gach durachd

AONGHAS MACNEACAIL,
Carlops, Peeblesshire.

Lookalike

Bruce

Basil

Sir,

The veteran TV presenter Bruce Forsyth – that wily old fox and presenter of Strictly Come Dancing – has been exposed to many foxy ladies in various attire. Is he perhaps related to the ultimate vulpine host, Basil Brush?

There is no need to ring back; lines are now closed.

Yours in the dugout,
GRAHAM DALLAS,
Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"We scored three goals at home and ninety-nine times out of ten that'll be enough."
DEAN WHITE
(Chris O'Meara)

"... it sounds like Lenin will be literally cheering in his grave."
JUSTIN WEBB, BBC News 24
(H. Nelson)

"Confidence seems to be draining away. You can invisibly see that."
MICHAEL OWEN, Radio 5 Live
(Peter Kamlish)

"It was as if Faldo was trying to reinvent the wheel and put people in spokes that just didn't fit them."
DAVID FACEY, Radio 5 Live
(Tony Bateman)

"He had a small cut behind his ear, which at first I thought might be a head injury."
Hendon & Finchley Times
(Henry Morris)

Pedantry Corner

...Your piece from The Telegraph (Pseuds Corner, 1220), reports a wedding dress made of rubber gloves on display at TUILLE House Museum, Carlisle. The establishment concerned is in fact TULLIE House – a problem with your spell-checker, or insufficient Telegraph proof reading?

COLIN WAKELING.

...A disappointing error positively blighted p. 25 of Eye 1219. John Keats did not write a poem named "Ode to Autumn". He did, however, write a poem named "To Autumn", which is often considered one of the Odes in all but name.

ANDREW LACEY.

...Amused as I was by the "Amy Winehouse – Live & Incoherent" gag (Eye 1219), I should point out that Ms Winehouse sings "Baah **to** *blahh". "Baah* **in** *blahh" is, as any fule kno, the signature ditty by those Australio-Scotch purveyors of electric rock 'n' roll, AC/DC.*

ROD MORISON.

...Knowing them as I did, I can assure readers that the original creators of Lara Croft (Letters passim) were far less concerned with her aristocratic background than with her pneumatic foreground.

BEN DAGLISH.

Environment chiefs told to hurry through incinerator

East Anglian Daily Times

Fans for the memories

...We believe Don Casterrovers is quite right. These made-up footer names are very silly, even our Portuguese chum Ben Fica agrees with us.

LIN COLNCITY and
WEST THAMUNITED.

...I'm just waiting for Gill Ingham to write in.

CHRIS TALL-PALACE.

...My partner and I are totally in agreement with Carl Isleunited (Eye 1219) and Don Casterrovers (Eye 1220) – these silly pseudonyms must stop NOW.

RAY THROVERS and GILL INGHAM.

...As a male, who has no interest in football whatsoever (and, no, "footie" fans, I am not gay) I find your publishing of letters containing hidden football references a complete waste of space. Please let this letter be an end to this facile entertainment.

C. O'VENTRYCITY.

... I have no status whatsoever in the footballing community, and yet I have always taken the greatest pleasure in hearing my name – my real, genuine, actual name – chanted on the terraces of my own home-town team. I therefore proudly sign myself,

R SNELL.

...The disgraceful attempts to promote local soccer clubs by the use of pseudonyms is just the sort of behaviour one expects from supporters of such a yobbish sport. Similar behaviour would not be tolerated amongst followers of the more refined sport of rugby football where exemplary behaviour is expected of both players and supporters alike.

SARA CENS.

... I am more concerned by the subliminal placement of company names by the same means. Please be vigilant and weed out this menace!

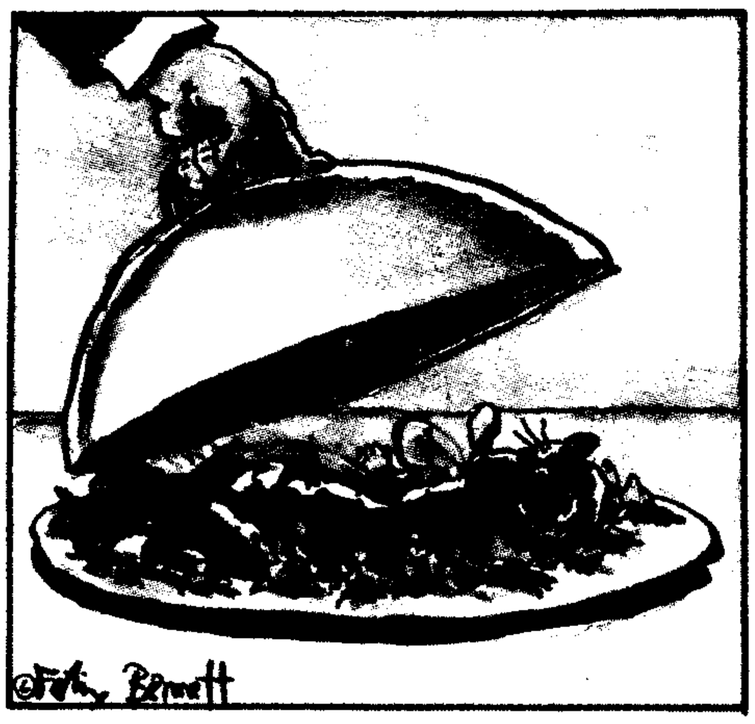
KEN TUCKYFRIEDCHICKEN.

● Lack of space prevents us from printing any more of the hundreds of letters on this supremely important topic, but a special supporters' enclosure has been created at www.private-eye.co.uk.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Rat meat is a healthy alternative to rice and grains," Vijay Prakash of the Bihar state welfare department told a press conference in Patna, "and should be eaten by one and all. Rat and chicken have equal food values, not only in protein, but throughout the entire spectrum of nutrition. I haven't tried it myself, but my mother has, and she finds it delicious. In fact,



whoever has eaten rat says it is more spongy and better than even chicken meat."

The welfare secretary's words were greeted with dismay by many listeners. "Indian culture is based on vegetarianism," said chef P. Soundararajan of the Mahindra resort chain. "Our culture and customs are based on not harming any living beings. And besides, rats are dirty creatures that only the very poor would eat."

But Prakash was unrepentant about his government campaign. "Almost 50% of India's grain stocks are eaten away by rodents in fields or warehouses. Increased human consumption of rodents will ease soaring food prices and provide increased employment for rat catchers. Rat has almost no bones, but many people do not know this simple cuisine fact. We will have a massive media campaign to persuade people to try it. Some of the hotels here in Bihar have already started selling rat meat, as a starter. If you order patal-bageri at one of our roadside hotels, that's what you'll get. Roasted rat." *(Express India, 18/8/08. Spotter: Julian)*

– ● –

● *"The Frame is a new 24-hour, High Definition, commercial-free art service, showcasing visual imagery from celebrated artists worldwide," Peter Bissonnette told subscribers to his Shaw Communications cable TV service in Calgary, Alberta. "The Frame will turn your television set into a virtual picture frame, where the world's greatest art will be delivered to your home in stunning visual quality. When your neighbours and guests see a Monet, a Picasso, or a Van Gogh in your living room, they will be deeply envious.*

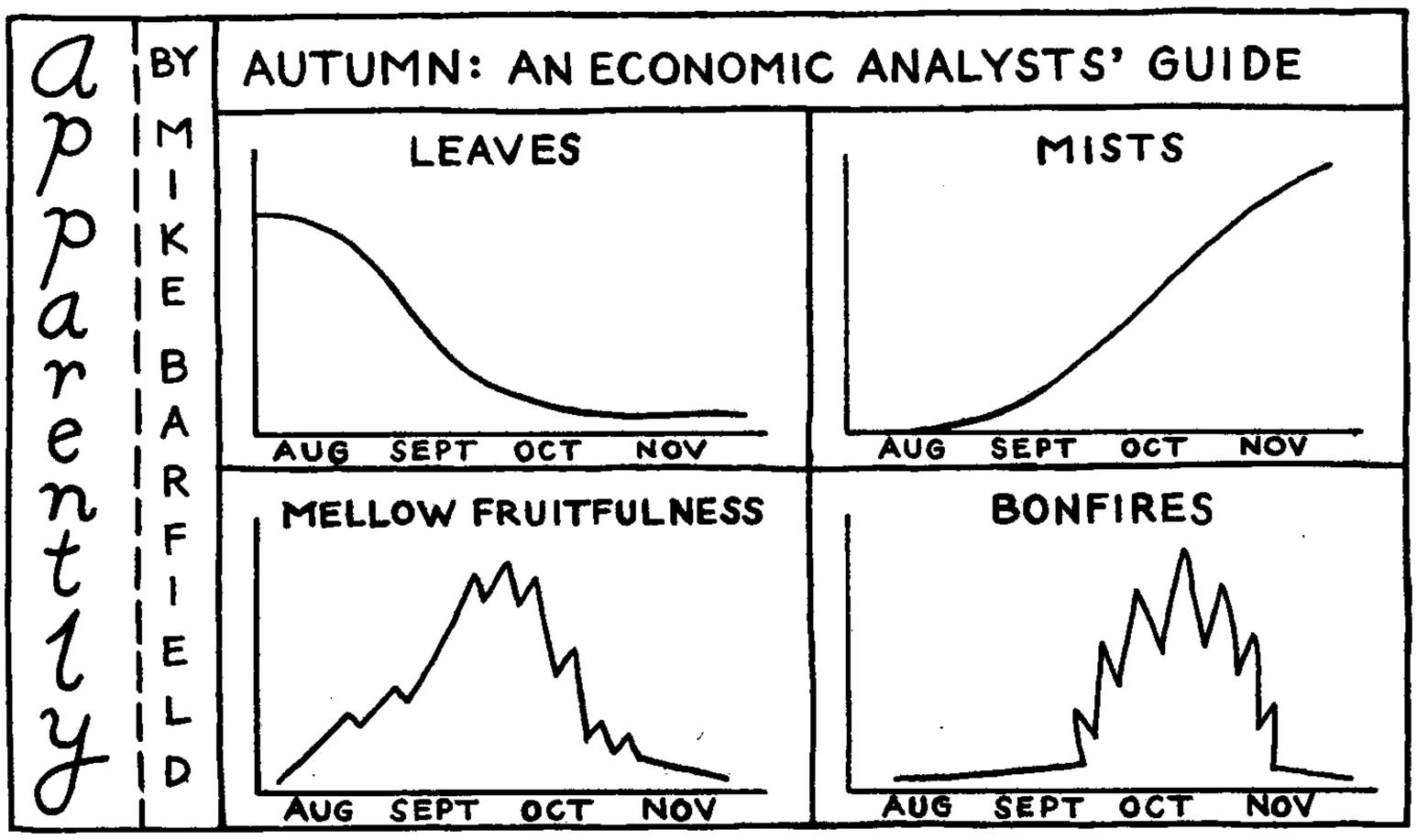
"In previous years, Shaw Communications has given its subscribers the Fire Log, the Christmas Tree, and Turkey TV. The popularity of those videos inspired The Frame, which launches initially on Shaw HD channel 225, and throughout the autumn in other major markets. The must-see premiere of The Frame will offer art lovers awe-inspiring images from 16 galleries, with rhythmic music to set the mood for each magical artistic theme. The galleries will rotate every 30 minutes, with images changing every 30 seconds." (BusinessWeek, 29/7/08. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)

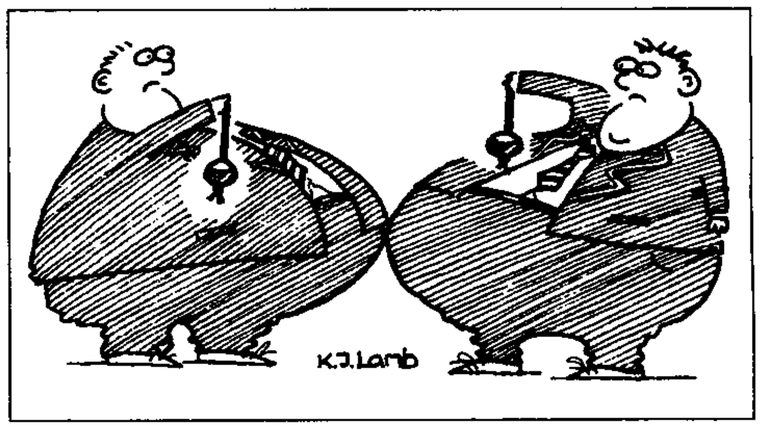
– ● –

● "At first, the patient would not tell us how the steel nut had become stuck on his penis," Dr Daud Abdul Rahim of the Hospital Sultanah Aminah in Johar Baru told reporters, "but he was clearly in great distress. Our first priority was to remove it, but even after draining some of the blood and cutting away the upper layer of skin on his penis, we still could not free it. So we called in the Fire and Rescue Department, who eventually managed to cut through the steel nut at around 11pm on Friday.

"Once the patient had recovered, he admitted to us what had happened. He is a welder, and had been trying to increase the length of his penis before his engagement next week, by weighing himself down with the nut. However, it got stuck on the shaft during an erection, and he would certainly have suffered from gangrene had we not been able to remove the nut.

"Curiously, this is the second case in the past week involving objects stuck on penises. Last Monday, firemen were summoned to the Universiti Malaya Medical Centre in Kuala Lumpur to assist in the removal of a steel ring from a patient's penis. In that case, he had slipped the ring onto his penis in the belief that it would increase his sexual prowess, but it had an unintended side-effect. It is too soon to say whether there will be long-term injuries in either case." *(The Star [Malaysia], 31/8/08. Spotter: Dan Fortune)*





From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Tattoo gays, says priest

Why the fuss? As I understand it, the Reverend Peter Mullen wants homosexuals to have their backsides tattooed with the warning: "Sodomy can seriously damage your health". Yet isn't this exactly what the high priests of homosexuality themselves preach, with their endless sermons on "safe sex"? My solution: tattoo everyone. For those who indulge (whether freely, absent-mindedly or unwittingly) it would be a useful precaution. Those with no interest could opt for the words of the bumper sticker: "If you can read this you are too close." – ***Robert "R"***

Harry Homosexual is no stranger to the church, but in the old days he kept his foibles under his cassock. The rot started when Rowan Williams and his ilk welcomed the full-blown gays with open arms. Now it's a case of "come one, come all." – ***Traditional_Christian***

Just what the world needs, a bunch of tattooed priests. Only in Bottler's Britain. – ***Cyril_the_cynic***

'Rent dodgers' shamed by estate agent

I must confess to some amusement when reading of the estate agent who punished recalcitrant tenants with signs saying "Rent dodger lives here". I personally would have no objection to such signs – in fact, I'm thinking of putting up my own. I am a rent dodger and proud of it. I pay no rent to a landlord and no mortgage to a bank, because I bought all three of my properties outright. And even with the current downturn in prices, they are worth at least eight million pounds. Beat that! – ***Jon***

National emergency

When Andy Murray competed in the US Open, I sucked Murray Mints all through his first game. He won, so I did the same in his next game. I kept sucking and he kept on winning, but the day of the final I couldn't get any Murray Mints, and he lost. I learned my lesson and stocked up for his next tournament. Then this economic crisis happened, so I decided to suck my way through my supplies until the country is on its feet again – ***Murray_Maniac***

Great stuff! Would any sweets work or do they have to be Murray Mints? – ***Bogbrush***

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 29

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

This official new photograph proves that the Supreme Leader is not enjoying the crisis and, to the contrary, is sharing the pain and suffering of Comrades everywhere.

Comrades!

I stand before you, not merely as the Supreme Leader of Britain, but as the Supreme Leader of the entire world. The leaders of all the nations have acknowledged that my plan to save our British banks is so brilliant it must be copied all over the globe. This is the triumph of Brownite Darlingist Bail-out-ism.

I am happy to accept the plaudits which have justly been paid to me in recent days for the benefits my decisive action has conferred upon the human race.

The times are indeed perilous, due entirely to external and global factors beyond my control. But, as my recent actions have made clear, I am now in a position to control them. And Comrades, Rejoice, Rejoice! We the Party have at last implemented that socialist programme that was so long treated with cynical contempt by the revisionist running dog Blair – now skulking with his fellow Wall Street parasites, begging to be rescued from the consequences of their reckless greed and folly.

1. We have at last, in accordance with the principles of our party since its foundation, taken all the private banks into state ownership – a programme of total nationalisation to last for as long as necessary.

2. Comrade Darling is to assert central authority over the banks on behalf of the people whenever he is requested to do so by the banks.

3. The banks to be punished with a swingeing £500 bn loan in order to allow them to function for the next few days or as long as necessary.

4. No longer will the fat cats sit in their City offices in their top hats, smoking their cigars and drawing their billion-pound bonuses. For a start, we have outlawed smoking cigars and the business of bonuses is under review. As for the top hats, these are in short supply since the world market has been cornered by the Neo-Bullingdonian-Cameronist-Borisites in order to act out their atavistic rituals.

5. Er...

6. Most importantly, at this moment of national crisis, I have restructured the Politburo in order to create a government of national unity and to summon all the nation's talents to fight against a common enemy – international Lehmanite Imperialist Globalised Capitalism; that very force that is destroying all my achievements of the last ten years in successfully abolishing the hated cycle of Boom-Bustism.

7. I am especially pleased to welcome on board my old and trusted comrade, Peter Mandelson. No one is better suited to stand shoulder to shoulder with me, as he has so often done in the past. Comrades will not need reminding of those dark days in the 1990s when we two stood alone in resisting the ruthless drive to power of the discredited former leader. We tried in vain to curb his worst personal excesses, to rein in his worship of the Bushite free market, and to prevent his reckless neo-imperialist adventurism in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Through all those long years of struggle, I have never known a more loyal or stalwart Comrade than the man who now stands beside me in this hour of trial, Comrade Peter Mandelson. Let me quote to you his inspiring words when I told him I needed experienced Comrades by my side :

"If it's a matter of huge mortgages and dodgy loans, then I'm your man!"

Signed

Gordon Brown

The Supreme Leader

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS

I'M THE MAN WITH THE PLAN!
WHAT IS IT DAVE?
ER... THE PLAN IS NOT TO LET ANYONE KNOW WHAT'S IN THE PLAN!
HOORAH FOR DAVE!
THERE'S A CRISIS, DAVE!
I'LL SAY - GORDON'S GETTING MORE POPULAR!
BIFF!
CRUNCH! CRASH!
POCKET MONEY MELT-DOWN
I KNOW, GORDON - LET'S FIGHT THIS TOGETHER!
OK - TAKE THAT!!!
OH NO! GORDON'S GIVEN HIM A BLOODY TOFFEE-NOSE!
THIS WASN'T IN THE PLAN
WHAT WAS?
I TOLD YOU - I'M NOT GOING INTO DETAIL
BOO FOR DAVE!!!

BRITONS

YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS YOUR MONEY!

Famous Lord Mandelson recruiting poster from the autumn of 2008

Credit Crunch Left You Feeling Gloomy? Try The Eye's Ten Ways To Cheer Yourself Up – *And They Are All Free!*

① Sit in the garden and watch the leaves turn yellow!

② Have a glass of water. The perfect detox!

③ Pop into your attic and see what's there! Hours of fun.

④ Have a good sit down. You've earned it!

⑤ Talk to yourself. It's nice to have someone to listen to you!

⑥ Have a look at the clock and see what time it is. Incredible how time flies!

⑦ Go to the toilet. You'll feel better for it.

⑧ Have a good scratch. Doesn't that feel good?

(That's enough. Ed.)

Have you got a favourite beating-the-credit-crunch-blues tip? Share it with us on patheticrubbish@allnewspapers.com

SHOCK NEW NEWS

Blair **did** lie about Ecclestone donation and Formula One tobacco advertising

Bears **do** shit in wood

Pope **is** Catholic

Great Political Quotations Of The 20th Century

"I'm a pretty straight sort of lie"

(T. Blair, 1997)

Let's Parlez Franglais!
with the late Kilometres Kington

No 94 At the G7 Summit

Sarkozy (pour c'est lui): Bonjour Monsieur Brown, nous sommes dans le creek de merde sans paddle, n'est-ce pas?

Brown: Parlez pour vous-même, Monsieur Sarko, **J'ai** un grand plan!.

Sarkozy: Oh, oui? Depuis quand?

Brown: Depuis cinq minutes ago. Ecoutez! Nous devons nationalizer toutes les banques.

Sarkozy: Mon dieu! C'est Socialism! Quelle horreure!!

Madame Merkel: Ich bin ein socialist!

All: Nous sommes tous socialists maintenant!

Carla Bruni: Anyone pour acheter mon nouveau CD?

(La chambre empties)

GLENDA SLAGG
Fleet Street's Original Ms Meltdown!?!!

■ **HAVE you heard the *Newsnight*, Mister?!? Dirty Old Gavin Esler has only ditched his missus and run off with the vixen of the violin, sexy Anna Phoebe!?!! What a disgrace!?!! What's it to be, Gavin?!? Air On A G-String?!? Want some advice from Auntie Glenda!!?! Get back to your studio and tell your gypsy fiddler to pluck off!?! (Geddit?)**

■ HATS OFF to Gavin Esler!?!! BBC's new Mister Sex!?! He's the *Nudesnight* (Geddit?) presenter who's found new happiness in the arms of the sexy scraper Anna Phoebe!?! He finds Romeo burns while *she* fiddles!?! (Geddit? *No. Ed.*) Now Gorgeous Gavin has another string to his bow!?!! OK, so he's been playing away with the vixen of the vibrato – who cares?!? Let's leave them to make beautiful music together!?! Shame about his missus though!?!?!

■ *Seen* Brideshead *yet? Me neither!?!* Bridezzzzhead *more like!?!* (Auntie Glenda's Film Funnies)

■ *Why is Pinter's play called* No Man's Land*?!? Because once you get in there you wish you could get out!?!! (Geddit?!)* (Auntie Glenda's Luvvie Laughs)

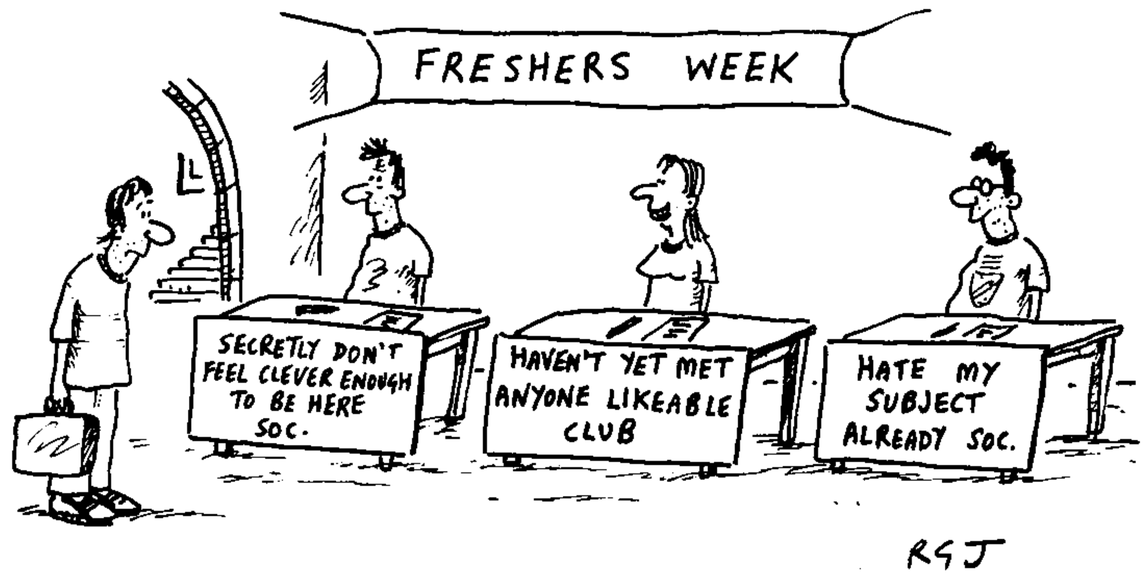
■ *HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Credit Crunch Cuties!?!*

● **John Sergeant.** Sexy star of *Strictly Come Round To My Place*!?!! Fancy a foxtrot, Big Boy!?!! Mmmmm!?!

● **John Sergeant.** You can't have enough of him – and there's plenty there!?! Do you want to show me your Bolero, Fancy-Pants?!?!!

● **John Sergeant.** Crazy trousers, crazy guy!?!!!

Byeee!!


FRESHERS WEEK
SECRETLY DON'T FEEL CLEVER ENOUGH TO BE HERE SOC.
HAVEN'T YET MET ANYONE LIKEABLE CLUB
HATE MY SUBJECT ALREADY SOC.
RGJ

GOVERNMENT UNVEILS NATIONALISATION

by Our City Reporter **Hugh Drop**

THE Government today sought to ease panic in the City and calm the stock-market as it unveiled a multi-billion pound plan to nationalise the BBC's business editor Robert Peston.

"We cannot stand by and do nothing as billions of pounds are wiped off stock prices every time Peston opens his mouth," said Alistair Darling's eyebrows.

"Once we have taken control of Peston, he will be placed in a dark cupboard where his arms and legs will quickly be de-leveraged by a couple of chaps with baseball bats."

Some analysts, however, warned that this plan was too little, too late, and would do little to alleviate Robert Peston in the short to medium term.

What You Missed

Jim Naughtie: And now for an update on the financial situation, it's over to the BBC's Business Editor, Robert Peston. Robert, what's happening in the markets?

Robert Peston: Aaargh... aaargh... Jim... aaargh... raPIDly changING scenario... aaargh, aaargh... Libor... Chancellor DarLING... recapitaliSATion... rumpelstiltskin stannahstair-lift.... aargh... aaargh... wider perspective... urgent measures in place... aaargh... leverage... seCURItisation... creDIT default swap... further stock market COLLapse... aargh...

Jim Naughtie: And would you say that this means the collapse of the entire British banking system and we should all queue round the block outside our banks, as we did when you told us about Northern Rock?

Robert Peston: Aargh... Difficult TO predict... hobgoblin... FSA... Bank of England... triparTITE inTERvention...

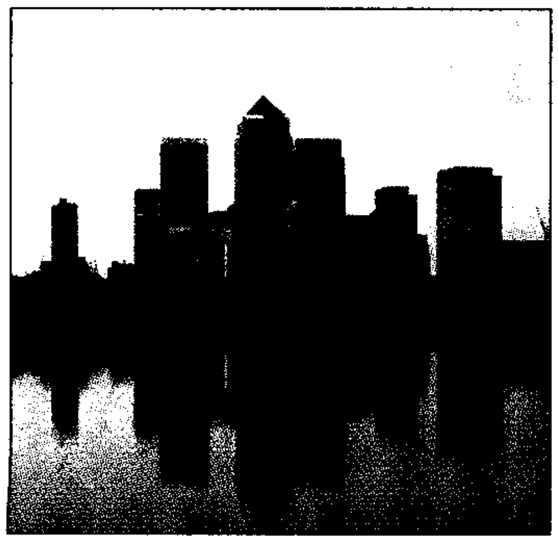
Jim Naughtie: Thank you, Bob. And now, thought for the day with the Governor of the Bank of England, Rev. Mervyn King – "These days I think all of us wonder from time to time. What the hell's going on? How are we going to get out of this mess? But you know, in a real sense, none of us has a clue

(cont. 94 kHz)

Exclusive to all Tory Papers

An Apology

IN RECENT years, we may have given the mistaken impression that the City was the driving force for growth in the economy, and that the "masters of the universe" and "superwomen" in the City who raked in well-earned mega-bonuses for deals which had transformed London into the banking capital of the world were people everyone should be proud of, as the wealth they've created has benefited each and every one of us in some way.



We now realise, in the wake of the ongoing credit crisis, that nothing could be further from the truth, and that the City is in fact nothing but a collection of sharp-suited robber barons, crooks, spivs and peroxide blonde harpies, all shamelessly feeding at the trough as they scoop up mega-bonuses for dodgy deals which have taken us to the brink of Armageddon, and who are deserving of nothing but stoning or beheading for the misery they've wrought.

We apologise for any confusion caused, and any confusion in the future when we criticise the Government's plan to take a share in the banks, saying that stifling risk-taking in the City will only make us all poorer in the long... etc, etc, etc

COULD NEASDEN GO UNDER?

BANK ANTARCTIC

by Our Credit Crunch Staff **Paul Footsie**

A LONDON council, it was learned last night, could well disappear after investing £700 million in the little known Bank of the Antarctic.

Said council leader Fred Dimwit, "This has come as a terrible shock to all those of us who work in the borough. It looked such a good idea when Michele in accounts saw the advert on the internet offering us 28% over six months."

Frozen assets

But now it turns out that the Bank of the Antarctic has literally been affected by a meltdown. The bank's headquarters, Igloo Number Five on the Captain Scott Industrial Estate, is now nothing more than a pool of water owing to global warming.

Neasden ratepayers (Sid and Doris Bonkers) were shocked to discover that their borough's assets had vanished along with the ice.

Said Sid, "We now face an uncertain future. We shall have to empty our own wheelie bins and fire ourselves for putting them out on a Tuesday instead of a Wednesday."

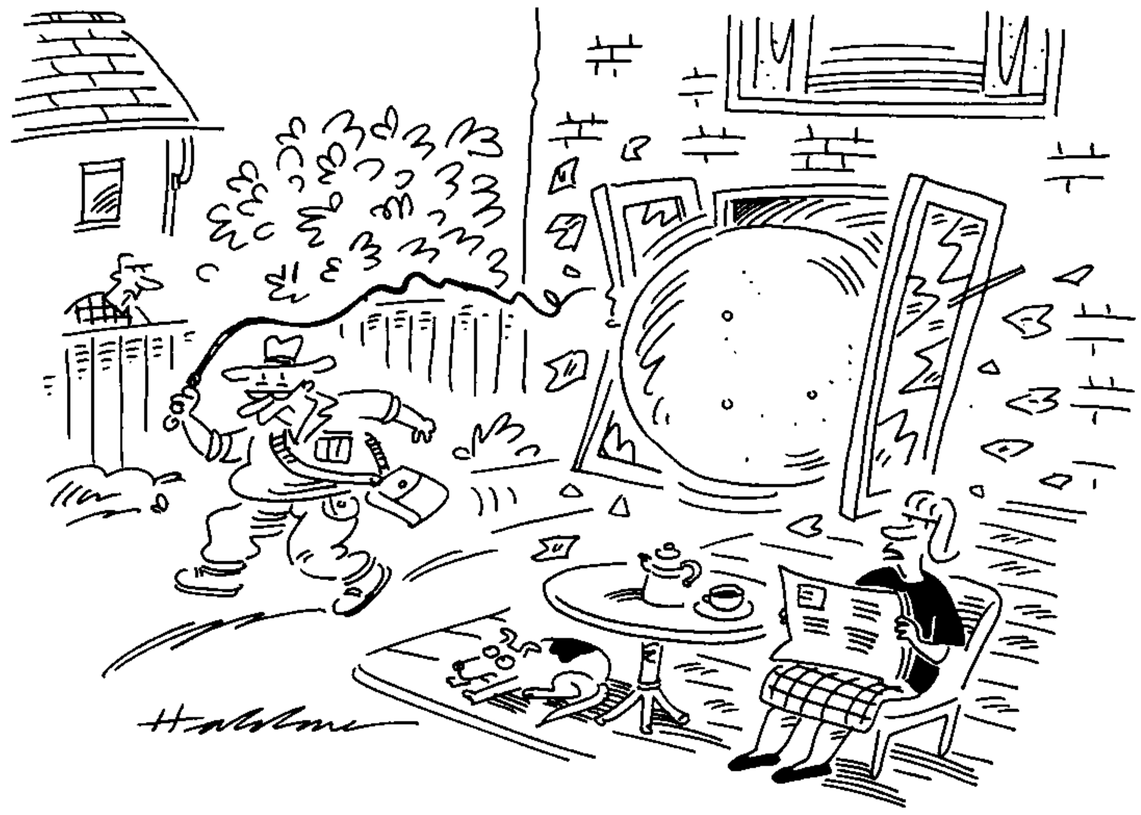
Last night Dimwit defended his council's decision to place all its funds with the Bank of the Antarctic.

Polar Bear Market

"How were we to know that it was run by an Innuit and two penguins with no financial experience?."

The advert that lost Neasden £700 million

Top bank bargains today	
The EasyKash Bank of Kazakhstan	18.6% per annum
The Tall Bank of Afghanistan	22.2% per annum
The Bank of Antarctica	28% per six months
The Bank of Zimbabwe	10,600,000% per day

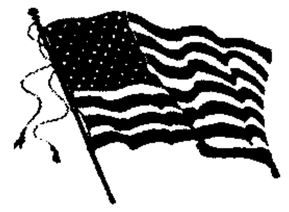


"Henry, this keeping up with the Joneses is getting tiresome"

GORDON'S RESCUE PLAN

"There has been a severe failure of financial regulation"

'I BACK OBAMA'



Says McCain – Palin 'A Lunatic'

by Our U.S. Election Staff **Phil O'Delphia** and **Penny Sylvania**

Republican Presidential candidate, Senator John McCain, told a rally of booing supporters in the town of Red Neck, Ohio, that his rival, the democratic candidate Senator Barack Obama, was "a good guy who would make a good president".

As he dodged bullets from the crowd, the 72-year-old war veteran explained that Mr Obama was not actually the head of al Qaeda, as Mrs Palin had claimed, nor had he personally flown an aircraft into the World Trade Center.

As the crowd began to chant *"Lynch the Darkie"*, a clearly bewildered McCain sought to defuse the situation by saying, "Vote Obama".

(Reuters)

£££££££££££££££££££

HOW TO BEAT THE CREDIT CRUNCH

TOP TEN TIPS

By Our Entire Staff

1. Save on heating bills by buying lots of extra clothes to keep warm.
2. Save on your clothing bills by wearing less and turning up the heating.
3. Save on hot water by taking your washing up into the bath and doing it there.
4. Don't serve expensive French wine at your dinner parties – try Ribena with meths. Tastes as good as vintage Margaux!
5. Save on lighting bills by going to bed as soon as it's dark. And don't get up again until it's light.
6. Save on petrol by never driving faster than 10mph.
7. Turn your spare bedroom into an indoor allotment. You can grow a wide range of nutritious vegetables, including mushrooms, lima beans and corn on the cob. And if it's big enough, why not keep chickens or a goat? Remember, the average spare room can feed a family of 15 for a year.
8. Forget madcap schemes of grow-your-own-self-sufficiency. Shop around in your local supermarket for past-their-sell-by-date-bargains. It's much cheaper.
9. Save on expensive postage. Be your own postman. Simply hop in the car and speed off to deliver that birthday card to your aunt in Glasgow.
10. Save pounds by not buying newspapers full of drivel like this, especially not the Telegraph now it's gone up to 90p.

£££££££££££££££££££

EYE MONEY

Our team of experts answer your credit crunch queries

Question: Two years ago I opened a flexi-access High Yield Three Year Interest Bond at the Liberian Bank of Commerce. I then converted this bond into a Seven Year Tax Free Non Refundable ISA at the Isle of Man Save and Prosper Building Society. If I were to withdraw my money before the yield window, would my standard rate fixed return be affected by the new regulations regarding offshore credit?

Answer: This is an interesting one. The answer is both yes and no. The key factor which the questioner has not told us is at what rate the stipulated interest was fixed? Was it zero interest because that is what the question raises *(That's enough advice, Ed)*

Let us know your money worries. Our experts are on hand 24/7 to answer your call *(Calls charged at £1.50 per second, minimum duration 10 minutes)*

"Mattresses are up... buy a mattress!"

In a letter to the court Hebb (23), of Oak Road, said she was very sorry.

She added: "I'm not a wreckless driver. This was the first crash I've ever been involved in and I haven't driven since that day."

Melton Times

DAILY not-in-the Mirror
Friday, October 17, 2003

THE MAN THEY CAN'T KILL IS BACK AGAIN

by Our Transylvania Political Staff
Michael Bite

YOU just can't write him off! Every time you think he is dead, you turn round to find he's behind you, smiling and showing off his teeth.

Yes, controversial Vlad Draculson is returning to the Transylvanian Government for the third time and to pave the way for his appointment he has been given a title. So from now on it's Count Dracula, Secretary of State for the Stakeholder Economy and the Blood Banking sector.

Dead Mandy Walking

Said one political observer, "Vlad may not be popular amongst local virgins and frightened village folk but you have to admit that he is a safe pair of fangs."

Batty Decision

Draculson was originally written off as a political force when he was exposed to daylight and quit the world of the living. But he defied expectations and returned to life after only a few hundred years lying low in the crypt.

He then suffered a second setback when he received a stake through the heart and had his head sawn off by opposition leader Van Helsing.

However his third re-awakening is perhaps the most surprising of all. Said one critic Count Mandelson is a real pain in the neck *(continued forever)*

What You Will See

The Coat Of Arms Of Baron Mandelson of Malfoy and Hartlepool

THE shield is quartered to show the symbols of Lord Mandelson's career. The first quarter commemorates the highly successful Millennium Dome. The second shows a field of moustaches rampant. The third shows heraldic Brussels Sprouts on a background of gravy, and the fourth shows a mortgage from the Britannia Building Society supported by a secret loan from Lord Robinson of Sleaze. The Mandelson motto is underneath and is not, as originally suggested, *Salve Nauticus*!

TELEGRAPH COMMENT

'He's not the Prince of Darkness: he's a total poppet'

Gill Hornby
Notebook

DON'T be taken in by all the talk about a "crazy megalomaniac intent on world domination".

I know Adolf very well because he was a house guest of ours for over six weeks.

And a kinder, more compassionate soul you couldn't wish to meet.

Here are some things you may not know about Adolf:

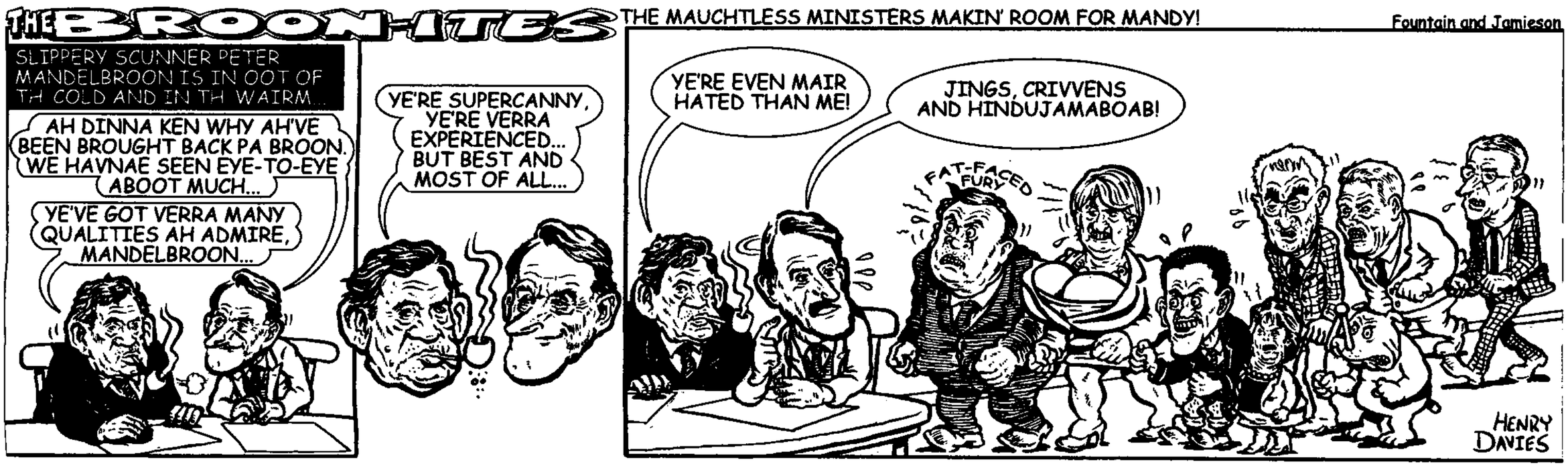
1. He loves to help with the washing up.

2. He adores dogs.

3. He's happiest when joining in a sing-song. His favourite is the Horst Wessel song.

4. He has beautiful manners. *(That's enough things we don't know. Ed.)*

BROWN 'RECALLS' MANDELSON


THE BROON-ITES
THE MAUCHTLESS MINISTERS MAKIN' ROOM FOR MANDY!
Fountain and Jamieson
SLIPPERY SCUNNER PETER MANDELBROON IS IN OOT OF TH COLD AND IN TH WAIRM...
AH DINNA KEN WHY AH'VE BEEN BROUGHT BACK PA BROON. WE HAVNAE SEEN EYE-TO-EYE ABOOT MUCH...
YE'VE GOT VERRA MANY QUALITIES AH ADMIRE, MANDELBROON...
YE'RE SUPERCANNY, YE'RE VERRA EXPERIENCED... BUT BEST AND MOST OF ALL....
YE'RE EVEN MAIR HATED THAN ME!
JINGS, CRIVVENS AND HINDUJAMABOAB!
FAT-FACED FURY
HENRY DAVIES

THE PRINCESS AND THE PEANUTS

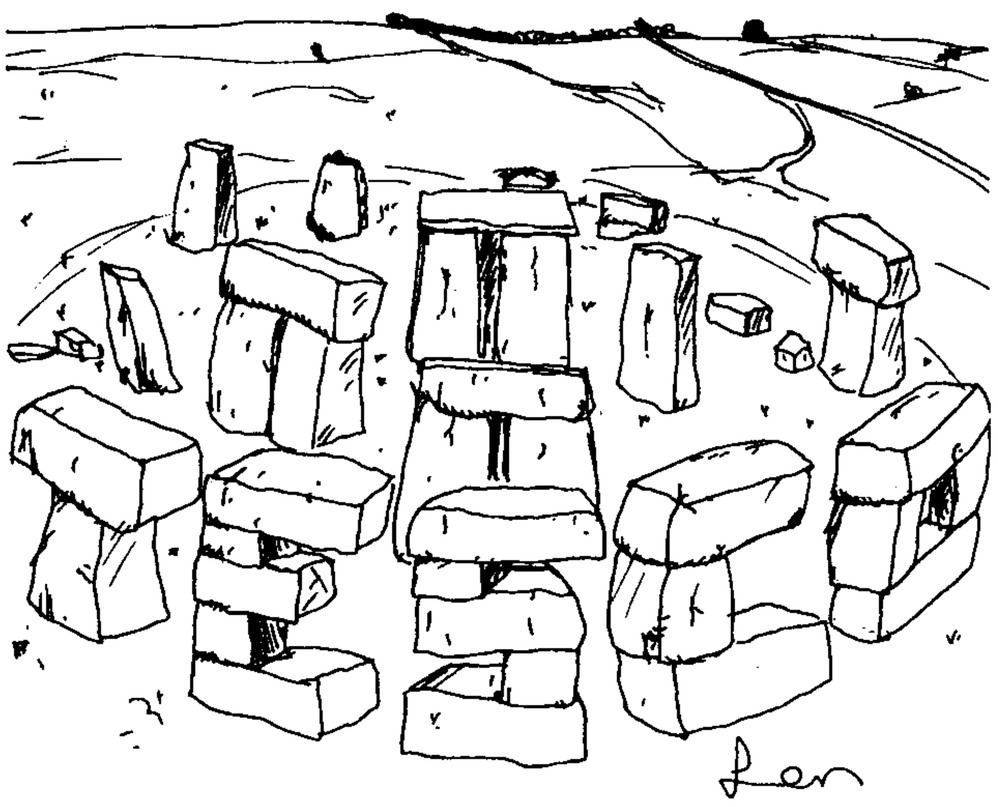
by Mother Goosestep

ONCE upon a time there was a pushy princess who lived in a lovely palace and paid peanuts in rent until, one day, the wicked Queen said, "Look, I've been subsidising you for years, but it really is time you coughed up."

Then the princess wept and wept and begged for mercy, saying, "I have no money and my husband cannot even afford a razor to shave off his silly beard."

But the wicked Queen was hard of heart and said, "If you don't like it, you can pushy off."

And the whole nation rejoiced and were happy ever after.



New excavations reveal the inevitable truth behind the mystery of Stonehenge

What You Won't Read

'Fifty People Who Have Buggered Up Britain'

by QUENTIN LETTS

1. **Paul Dacre.** Foul-mouthed, power-crazed editor of the Daily Mail. His warped political agenda and obsession with house prices has driven Britain to the brink of the abyss. Arch hypocrite Dacre claims to deplore filth, but then peddles it on every page.

2. **Lord Rothermere.** Shadowy, evil genius behind the Daily Mail. Makes millions from scaring his readers to death by obsession with falling house prices.

3. **Quentin Letts.** Foul-mouthed Mail columnist who recycles old pieces into a new book to be serialised in Daily Mail and debases public discourse by putting word "Bugger" in book title in the hope that *(cont. p. 94)*

Advertisement

Is your memory letting you down?

Do you find yourself taking part in Presidential debates and forget what your opponent is called?

His name is as familiar as your own or a member of your family. And yet somehow your mind goes blank and you are reduced to pointing at Barack Obama and saying, "That one!", causing you immense embarrassment in front of 86 million people!

Now help is at hand with "Retirement", a new treatment that allows you to retire gracefully from the public stage and spend your declining years in one of your many homes, instead of shuffling about on the public stage making a fool of yourself.

The Eye's Most Commented On Web Stories

1. Is Britney Spears John Lennon's love child?

2. Who is Swansea's lesbian cellar murderer?

3. Can pomegranate juice bring back the magic to your love life?

4. "Sex-change ref asked me to marry him" says Lamps.

5. "Is the EU to blame for Global Warming?" asks Dr Barkworth.

Would you like to comment on the most commented stories? Just go to desperatedrivel@telegraph.co.uk

"See? 'Tis a National Treasure map"

Mayor Boris Johnson Tells It Like It Isn't

CRIPES! Everyone is going around saying that I sacked Sir Ian Blair and I'm a total rotter! Well, hang on there, old bean! As I was telling John Humphrys on the Today programme (when he let old Boris get a word in edgeways), I did no such thing! I've always rated superplod Blair and I told him that he was doing a damn good job! Crime down, picaninnies with knives safely behind bars, everything tickety-boo in the capital, what? And blow me down, in walks Brother Blair to my office and says, "Permission to resign, sir". What's a chap supposed to do? I pleaded with him to stay on. I said, "You're fired". Whoops! Old Boris has let the cat out of the bag. Blimey!

© The Daily Beanograph

POLICE HUNT FOR NEW CHIEF

by Our Man At New Scotland Yard **Phil Position**

THE Metropolitan Police were last night urgently looking for a new Commissioner.

A spokesman issued a description of the wanted man: "He is a supremely capable, intelligent, far-sighted, middle-aged man with extensive experience of policing at a national level."

He continued, "What we will probably get is a young Brazilian electrician who *(cont. p. 94)*

SAATCHI'S EGG DIET LATEST

"I assure you that we take all complaints very seriously"

DE MENEZES INQUEST

'WE DID NOTHING WRONG'

Top Policewoman Spells It Out

by Our Court Staff **Karl Marksman**

A DEFIANT Chief Inspector Cressida Knacker told a crowded inquest yesterday that the Menezes killing "was a flawless police operation in which no mistakes were paid".

She continued, as weeping relatives were led out of the court, "The fact that an innocent man was shot dead is neither here nor there. And anyway he was acting in a funny way and deserved to be killed.'

When asked the question by Michael Hugefeeld QC, "What led you to believe that Mr Menezes was the wanted terrorist?" She answered, "Because our officers thought he was. And anyway he looked just like the photographs that they hadn't seen."

Mr Hugefeeld then asked the Police Chief if this tragedy could happen again.

"Most certainly," she said, "especially if I am in charge. Innocent people will inevitably be killed if we are to avoid innocent people being killed."

Your TV Tonight

Someone Famous Goes Somewhere Foreign And Tells Us About It
Channel 5, 9.00pm

Someone Else Famous Goes Somewhere Else And Tells Us About It
BBC1, 9.00pm

Yet Another Famous Person Goes Somewhere Else And Goes On About It At Length
ITV 9.00pm

Someone Famous Bangs On About Trains and
(That's quite enough. Ed.)

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Jörg Haider, Austrian Neo-Nazi politician killed in a car crash.

So. Farewell
Then Jörg Haider.

You were on
The far right.

Too far
Right.

And going far
Too fast.

That's why
You crashed.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

Lines on the Passing of National Poetry Day (9th October)

So. Farewell
Then
National Poetry
Day.

Yes, you have
Come and
Gone.

And were sadly
Missed by
Most people.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOOD
PLAYING FOR ENGLAND, DOES IT STILL MEAN ANYTHING?
OF COURSE
BUT TO A LOT OF FANS IT APPEARS THAT YOU DON'T REALLY CARE ABOUT GETTING THAT CAP
YOU'RE JOKING?..
THAT'S ALL ME AND THE LADS EVER THINK ABOUT!
CALLS FOR A SALARY CAP

DIARY

MICHAEL PARKINSON

I'll never forget the time I had the late, great, fill his name in later on the show.

I'd admired fill his name in later as a legendary performer ever since I was a Yorkshire lad – though I never dreamt in a million years that one day I'd get to meet my idol!

When the time came to do the interview, fill his name in later walked on to the set with all the customary grace of a legendary performer from the days when the expression 'star quality' really meant something.

Yes, they knew how to make 'em in those days. That's what I thought to myself as I watched him walk towards me with that legendary hand of his outstretched.

I proceeded with my first question, and then onto my second. His replies were fascinating. I asked a third, then a fourth, and he answered them all with consummate ease. Fill his name in later told me how he'd been a film star for years – decades, even. I listened in awe.

Who would have thought that a young muddy-kneed whippersnapper from Barnsley would end up chatting away to one of the greatest stars this world has ever produced? To this day, I'll never remember what he told me, but all in all, my interview with fill his name in later was one of the most memorable it's ever been my privilege to conduct.

● Stephen Hawking: he may not be able to run quite as fast as other blokes, but he more than makes up for it in sheer brain-power!

Believe me, I've had my fair share of snipers. People who've achieved nowt in their own lives but are happy to attack a working class lad who's lived to become one of our best-loved household names and has struck up close personal friendships with some of the most legendary figures of this or indeed any other century.

I might make it look easy – that's all part of the skill – but, take it from me, it's one of the most demanding jobs known to mankind.

First, you've got to pick the right guests. That's an extraordinary skill and one that only comes with hard-won experience. One wrong booking, and you could be faced with talking for up to seven minutes with someone who's barely well-known let alone famous or legendary. And that's something you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy.

You've then got to introduce them in the right way. It's no good asking an audience to welcome a legendary all-round sportsman who's a legend in his own lifetime only to have a leading Hollywood actress who seems to have the unique talent for breathing life into every role she takes on walk down those stairs. Audiences aren't daft. Far from it. They can sense when something's wrong.

● Frank Sinatra: the voice of an angel – but they say he never conquered his inner demons.

Then you've got to make sure you ask your guests the right questions. That's the trickiest part of this profession, because there are five questions in all, and you've got to ask them the right order. They are –

1) By all accounts, you had a pretty tough childhood. Tell us about it.

2) It must have been a fascinating experience, acting opposite what can only be described as some of Hollywood's all-time greats?

3) What to my mind is quite remarkable is how you've obviously managed to keep your feet firmly on the ground. How have you managed this?

4) But fame must have its drawbacks?

5) And of course you knew the late, great X who in my book was a true legend. You must have some truly tremendous memories of that remarkable man/ lady?

● Fred Astaire: boy, could the man dance!

And then you have to keep all the appropriate responses in your head at all times, ready to come out with them the moment your subject has completed the agreed anecdote.

a) "Marvellous! Let's face it – they don't make 'em like that anymore"

b) "Ahh. They don't make 'em like that anymore.

c) "Oh dear." *(Wipe away tears of laughter)* "They don't make 'em like that anymore"

d) "I think it can honestly be said, they don't make 'em like that anymore."

f) "You know, it only goes to show – they don't make 'em like that any more."

● Geoff Boycott: a Yorkshireman, through and through.

I've nothing against the young interviewers of today. You're not going to find me criticising what others might call their vulgarity, their egotism, their lack of that elusive thing, star quality. They've got their job to do, I've got mine. If they think they're bigger than their guests, well, that's their business. But – and let's mention no names – some of them seem to think it's enough just to make it all up as they go along. And then they invariably pick the wrong response. That's not what I call conversation. No often they're regularly left wondering where it all went wrong.

And let's not forget the finale – that's another hard-won skill. You've got to be able to finish the show in the appropriate manner, so when the second the floor manager cues you in, you say:

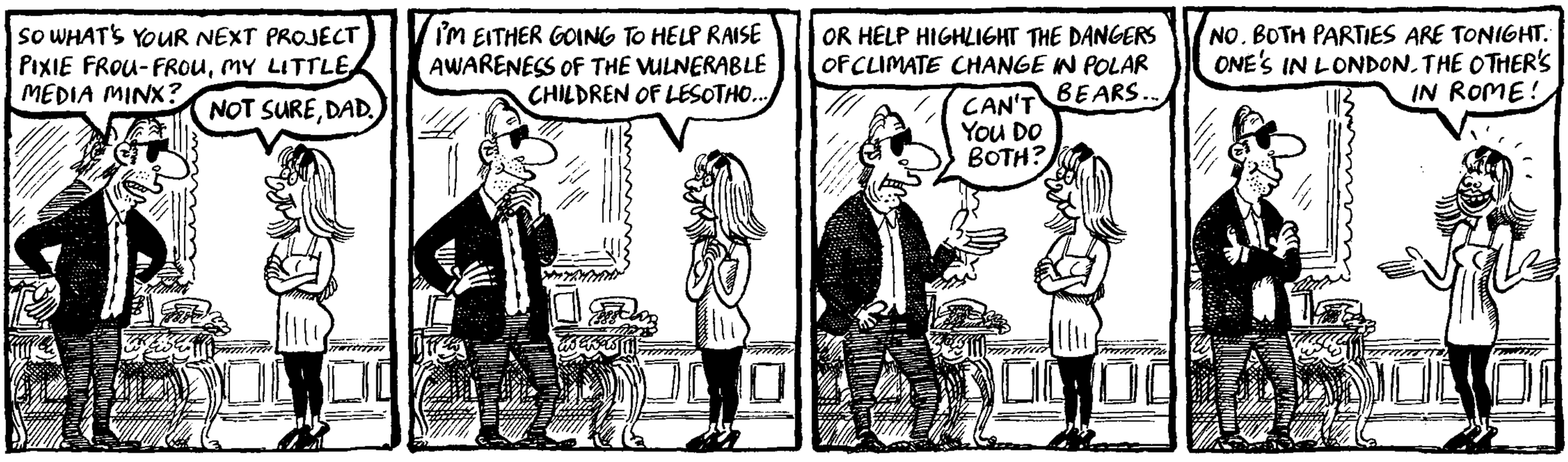
"Sadly, I'm going to have to stop you there, that's all we've time for. My thanks to my guests A, B, C and D...."

It's not a skill they can teach you at any of your toffee-nosed public schools. It's called rapport. It's a talent, and one which – uniquely, in the eyes of the majority of responsible commentators – I'm fortunate to possess. And that, I might add, is deeply humbling.

● Muhammad Ali: they don't make 'em like that any more.

I'll never forget a show we did with the unforgettable fill his name in later. He was on the show with the truly extraordinary fill his name in later. Things were going fine, and then something totally unexpected happened. Disaster seemed to threaten, and it was a close shave, but luckily my quick thinking saved the day. It's easy to laugh about it now, but believe you me, as they say in Barnsley, it were pretty bloody hairy while it were 'appenin!

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


SO WHAT'S YOUR NEXT PROJECT PIXIE FROU-FROU, MY LITTLE MEDIA MINX?
NOT SURE, DAD.
I'M EITHER GOING TO HELP RAISE AWARENESS OF THE VULNERABLE CHILDREN OF LESOTHO...
OR HELP HIGHLIGHT THE DANGERS OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN POLAR BEARS...
CAN'T YOU DO BOTH?
NO. BOTH PARTIES ARE TONIGHT. ONE'S IN LONDON, THE OTHER'S IN ROME!

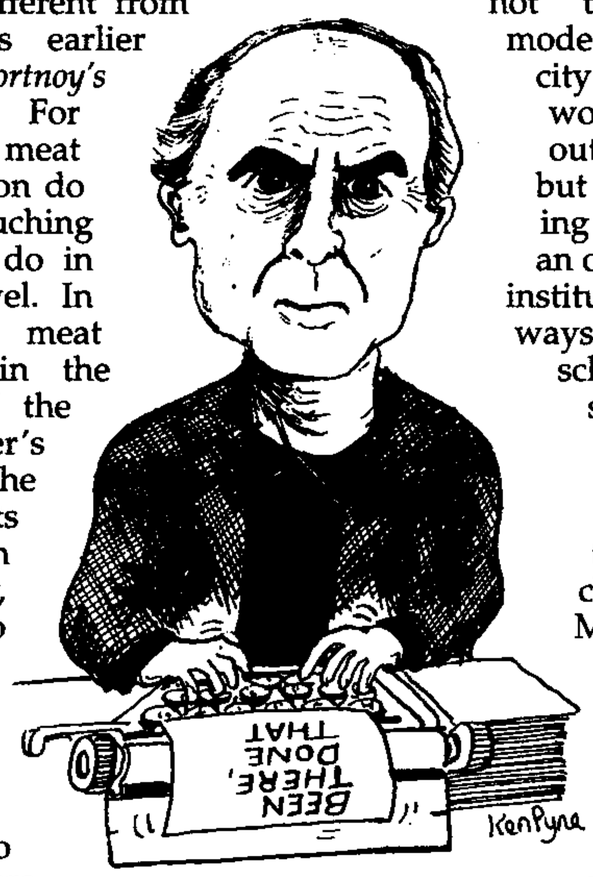
Literary Review

Gripes of Roth

Indignation
Philip Roth
(Cape, £16.99)

IF YOU actually needed a novel about meat, masturbation and tortured Jewish manhood, then Philip Roth would be your *mensch*. Trouble is, it's been done before, and better, and by the very same author.

Of course the plot of *Indignation* is quite different from that of Roth's earlier triumph, *Portnoy's Complaint*. For example, the meat and masturbation do not share a touching scene, as they do in the earlier novel. In *Indignation* the meat comes early, in the descriptions of the kosher butcher's shop which the hero's parents own and in which, as a boy, he is expected to work. The masturbation comes later, at the backward-looking college in Ohio where the hero goes to escape his neurotic parents, expecting nothing more than to be allowed to study in peace and quiet, and ends up in all sorts of trouble. But the basic theme is much the same, and much as poet Philip Larkin so pithily put it: "They fuck you up, your mum and dad / They may not mean to, but they do."



The novel is set in the early 1950s, at the time of the Korean War. Roth may have chosen that period in order to draw comparisons with the present time, when America is once again mired in a bloody but apparently futile war in a far off country, or he may be harking back to his own youth; but I suspect the real reason was because it provided him with the simplistic moral landscape he needed to make his story work at all, and a quick end.

The hero Marcus Messner's indignation (which is almost a medical condition, like the complaint which affects Portnoy) stems from the fact that, at every turn, and by everyone he encounters, his desire to be normal is frustrated. He is a model straight-A student who just wants to graduate well and get a good job. But he cannot study at his local college in Newark because his father is so morbidly afraid of his son being injured or killed that he makes his life a misery.

So Marcus shunts himself off, not to a progressive modern university in a city (where of course he would not have stood out like a sore thumb), but to the antic-sounding Winesburg College, an obscure Midwestern institution which in many ways seems more like a school than a university. One of its rules is that every pupil, whatever their religious denomination, must attend chapel regularly. Marcus, though not the only Jew on campus, is the only one prickly enough to take his resentment to the pitch of outright mutiny.

Compulsory chapel is not the only thing that gets his goat. He can't get on with his room-mates. He can't get on with the dean. He can't even get on with his nice gentile girlfriend, though she seems obliging enough: he thinks that the fact she gave him a blowjob on their first date means there's something wrong with her. In fact there is, but it isn't that. She's a recovering alcoholic with a scar on her wrist from an attempted suicide. (Roth takes this as a cue for a dodgy disquisition on the vein-slitting blood-draining aspect of ritual slaughter.) But when Marcus gets appendicitis and has to have an operation, she is the one who not only visits him in hospital but, obliging as ever, attends to his every need in his sick bed.

When Marcus returns to his room some weeks later, he finds it has been "violated" in his absence in a weird inversion of his girlfriend's devoted attentions: one of his former room-mates, an obnoxious thespian, turns out to have had a crush on him, and to have expressed it by repeatedly going into his room and ejaculating over all his things. You might wonder why no one had been in to clean the room, but let that pass, for Roth's development of the theme now descends into even greater absurdity. During a freak blizzard, the male students on campus are affected by a sudden collective, er, wank-frenzy, in which they descend en masse on the girls' dorms, ransack their drawers for underwear, and (while the girls run away) masturbate all over their panties and bras before triumphantly chucking them out of the windows. This climactic scene results in a mass expulsion of students, and in the midst of the brouhaha Marcus (though not involved) is also evicted for no better reason than his failure to kowtow to the chapel rule.

In consequence he is drafted to fight in Korea and is duly bayoneted to death by enemy troops. Thus, abruptly, ends the story which, by an authorial sleight of hand, Marcus has himself narrated, after his death, in a sort of limbo.

Where the writer's theme has been indignation, the reader's will probably be disappointment. Roth toys with ideas (butchers' knives and bayonets, ritual slaughter and suicide, butchery and surgery, the oppressive nature of religious and political conformity, etc) but the parallels he draws seem too contrived. It is yet another trip to Roth-land, with a title that could have been applied to almost any of his other books. If anyone should feel indignant at this revisiting of well worn themes, perhaps it is the reader.

"Books? Try the charity shop..."

LIBRARY NEWS

■ JUST a week before government inspectors arrived in Lambeth to check up on services including libraries, three new "cultural information hubs" opened.

Based in a children's centre, a youth centre and a housing office in the south London borough, each hub had library books available to borrow. Six weeks later they all closed down – having loaned just 25 books between them.

After discovering the pathetic borrowing figures, opposition councillor Andrew Sawdon accused the council of creating "ghost libraries" to fool the audit commission. The closure of libraries in Clapham Park and Streatham Vale meant the council would miss targets on library opening hours, putting at risk its already feeble one-star cultural services rating. Cllr Sawdon was told that if the council lost its cultural services star it would undermine efforts by the council to retain its overall three-star performance rating for all services.

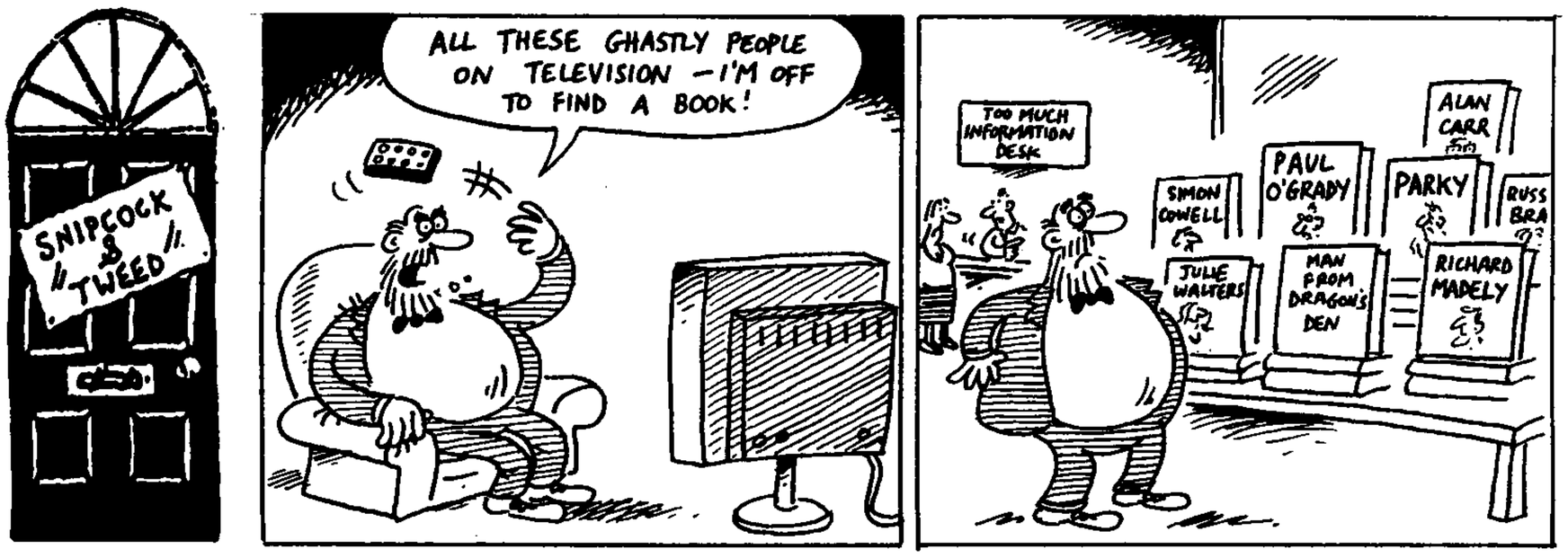
The council has denied that the hubs were created purely for the inspection, saying they were intended to boost voter registration for the mayoral elections. However, papers from a meeting of Lambeth's environment and community safety scrutiny sub-committee earlier in the year show that thanks to the three hubs the library service's "opening hours per 1,000 population" figures for the year were much improved. "These hubs meet the requirements of a library and are therefore included in this outturn," says the paper.

WHAT A LE CARRÉ ON

■ *MAIL* diarist Ephraim Hardcastle's eye is drawn to a "quote" from author and screenwriter John Le Carré: "[He] says Pierce Brosnan ruined the film he scripted, *Dante's Peak*. 'The character, Harry Dalton, was supposed to be this short, fat middle-aged spy but they gave the part to Pierce Brosnan, who is a beautiful creature. It just didn't work.' Only a master wordsmith could mint so acceptable an insult."

And only Peter McHackey, aka Ephraim Hardcastle, could make such a balls-up. Le Carré did not write *Dante's Peak*, an action blockbuster about a volcano, but he did write *The Tailor of Panama*, in which Brosnan played spy Andy Osnard.

Is the *Mail* diary now so desperate for material that it is lifting quotes from any dodgy internet source?



Books & Bookmen

■ IT SEEMS only yesterday that barely a prize ceremony went by without Picador winning something – back-to-back Bookers for Alan Hollinghurst and John Banville, a string of poetry awards, a Samuel Johnson for a biography by Jonathan Coe, even a Nobel Prize for VS Naipaul.

Recently, however, the Macmillan literary imprint has lost its lustre, with only the poets still reliably collecting gongs; and the holy grail of finding an author who is both classy and commercial has also proved elusive.

Hence Macmillan bosses' evident desperation to find a more dynamic replacement for former Picador head Andrew Kidd, who left in April after presiding over the decline but had announced his departure in January. All of nine months later, Paul Baggaley was unveiled earlier this month as his successor – *faute de mieux*, as rumour suggests that Random House editors who were seen as rising stars declined eyebrow-raising sums on top of their salaries to defect.

Gallingly for Baggaley, one writer has already bolted between his appointment and his arrival from HarperCollins. Colm Toibin has gone to Penguin. And the agent who moved him there? In a delicious touch worthy of a Toibin story, it was Peter Straus, who before becoming an agent oversaw Picador in its golden years.

■ ONE OF the meanings of "portillo" in Spanish is "gap", and there has certainly been a notable one in Michael Portillo's efforts as chairman of this year's Booker prize.

The prize's website promises he will be "blogging on a regular basis", but as of Friday 10 October (despite now being merely a stand-in *Sunday Times* columnist) he had only managed to stir himself to write two blogs, and had been silent since 15 May. His predecessor Howard Davies posted six pieces between July and the eve of the prizegiving, but not even the longlist and shortlist announcements prompted Portillo into online activity.

No doubt the former Tory minister believes in performance-related pay, so there's a clear case for cutting his fee accordingly.

■ MOST of a broadsheet page of the *Financial Times* was recently taken up by a gigantic review by the ubiquitous AC Grayling of *Eyewitness to History*, a four-volume, 2,032-page, £120 shelf-filler published by the Folio Society. This was "a fascinating treasure-trove", the philosophy prof enthused, praising editor Robert Fox's "admirable selections" and salivating that his "outstanding anthology" was "irresistible".

As the *Eye* has noted before, the rigorous scrutiny Grayling applies to others' everyday ethical dilemmas (about which he used to write a *Guardian* column) doesn't seem to extend to his own reviewing. Indeed, it's a reasonable working hypothesis that there's a connection (undeclared, naturally) with author, agent or publisher behind any rave review by him. And so it proves! Grayling is the author of an introduction to Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*, in the luxury £44.95 leather-bound edition published by... the Folio Society.

■ LATEST casualty of the financial crisis: agreeable days out for readers of a certain age.

Random House has told all its authors it will no longer be paying for them to schlep to literary festivals around the country unless organisers can demonstrate a statistically significant effect on book sales or publicity.

This is unlikely to pose much threat to Edinburgh, Cheltenham or Hay-on-Wye (where every syllable is dutifully taken down at dictation speed and reproduced in the following morning's edition of sponsor paper the *Guardian*). But with other publishers sure to follow Random House's example, and most authors both unable and unwilling to stump up their own cash on receipt of their umpteenth "although we are unable to offer a fee" letter, it seems unlikely that all 140 of the other events which described themselves as "literary festivals" in the UK in 2008 will be making a reappearance in 2009.

Jeremy Clarkson

■ "AS ALARMED savers find their nest egg is deep-frozen in an Icelandic bank and families cut down to essentials, with her usual impeccable sense of timing, Cherie Blair splashes out on a £30,000 exercise pool for her £4.4m country mansion," snorted an outraged Allison Pearson in the *Daily Mail* last week.

Elsewhere in her column, the penny-pinching Pearson noted: "I am writing a novel that features my own teen idol, David Cassidy." What she omitted to mention was that the advance she received from American publishers Miramax for the novel back in 2003 was $700,000 (£435,000) – and that the only reason she is beavering away on it now is that, in a take-the-money-and-run episode of Cherie-esque proportions, she declined to answer any of the company's inquiries about the book's whereabouts until they threatened legal action to recover the cash this summer.

'Bookworm'

LUVVIES

"At heart, I'm a soldier who didn't know how nasty and ongoing the battle was going to be and lost some people and took some hits. I feel like now I've got a Purple Heart, and I'm back," he says finally.

ROBERT DOWNEY JR, *The Sunday Times*

Submitted by Strobes.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Pseuds Corner

An unflinching emphasis on the primitive helps to explain the essentially pragmatic nature of esoteric social traditions.

Caption to a still from the Japanese film 'Ballad of Narayama', *Sight and Sound*

In this new-found spirit of humility we found a name for a boy (Felix) that we could imagine my partner himself wearing comfortably, and named our girl (Clementine or 'Clem') after an Italian friend who, when taken hostage in Afghanistan, had crowds of both Catholics and Muslims calling for her release on the streets of Rome and Kabul. It made the name seem an auspicious choice for the coming decades of global culture clash.

OPHELIA FIELD on baby-naming, *Sunday Telegraph* 'Stella' magazine

The new Volkswagen Scirocco...is uncompromisingly up-to-date and bursting with its own legitimate identity yet, at the same time, it fully lives up to the name it inherits. This car is more like listening to Bob Dylan's admirable and individualistic son Jakob than it is to hearing the original members of Cream strum through their old hits.

Sunday Telegraph magazine

2008 is a strange time to be a man. Well, to be specific, it's a tough time to be what we call a "man's man." This rugged nomad is a dying breed, quickly being replaced by she-men who get manicures. Does a man who'd rather use his bare hands to kill his dinner have time to obsess about his cuticles? This mountain lion of a man would much rather drink bat urine or bite the head off a live snake. In other words, he'd rather be Bear Grylls.

From the Craghoppers autumn/winter catalogue, advertising the 'Bear Grylls range'

In his going I can see Turner's wonderfully evocative painting of the Fighting Temeraire, battle deeds done, being towed to the breakers' yard in Rotherhithe (Gough as the ghostly Temeraire, not the perky steam driven tugboat to the fore, although that has some resonance too.)

His was a heart of oak, absolutely indefatigable, at his finest with full sails billowing...[*continues*]

MIKE SELVEY on the retirement from cricket of Darren Gough, *Guardian*

When Tate Modern exhibited a giant sun, to create its own indoor climate, the beautiful Guardian headline – "But is it weather?" (a rare example of a question mark being required) – deserved to be framed and exhibited in a gallery in its own right.

DAVID MARSH, *The Guardian Book of English Language*

"That track started when I decided to switch on a 30-year-old synth and throw lemons at the keyboard to see what would happen."

ANDY CARTHY (aka Mr Scruff), *Big Issue*

Pseuds Corporate

Mankind has the capability to split atoms. Now it has the capacity to profile customers intelligently in real time.

HUGH ROBERTS of Patni Telecoms, press release

CONTRIBUTORS: Philip Lunnon, Eithne Ryan, Don Roberts, Grant Cornwallis, Paul O'Neill, Matthew Wilson, Nik Speller, Nick Booth.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

ACTIS/CDC

The Quiller memorandum

THE public relations campaign from the increasingly commercial but publicly-owned international development fund CDC, formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation, is picking up steam.

A couple of months ago the *Eye* made a freedom of information request to see internal "development impact" assessments and reports from fund managers on their compliance with the firm's "business principles". This was in light of the fund's move away from investing in things like agriculture into more lucrative businesses such as shopping centres (*Eyes passim*).

Such seems to have been the alarm caused by the prospect of having the issue exposed that CDC, the department for international development (DfID)and CDC's privatised fund manager Actis immediately commissioned PR company Quiller to devise a "development impact campaign" with the following timings: "message development and campaign planning: September"; "implementation: October to December".

Now, predictably, the *Eye's* requests have been refused on the grounds that the reports are "commercially sensitive" and that it would not be in the public interest to release them because of "the damage to CDC's business relationships".

The idea that the public interest in a public development fund's own assessments of its development impact is trumped by commercial considerations is unlikely to survive scrutiny by the Information Commissioner in the long. But it can be a very long run, with FoI complaints taking years to be resolved at the under-funded commissioner's office. By the time the truth comes out the PR campaign will, CDC doubtless hopes, have done its stuff.

Meanwhile CDC is already schmoozing sceptical MPs. Emails in recent weeks to communications director Miriam De Lacy were met with the news that she was away for a fortnight "attending the UK party political conferences". Another great use of poverty relief funds.

Public "implementation" of the campaign – for which Quiller was required by CDC to have "proven media and opinion former relationships" – duly arrived on 3 October when chief executive Richard Laing went into print through the *Times* letters page, latching on to a piece from the paper's Camilla Cavendish criticising the use of aid money and appealing for more business development and job creation. "How encouraging to read the sensible comment by Camilla Cavendish," opened Laing, continuing: "Investment doesn't have the 'celebrity appeal' of aid, but as national government budgets tighten and commercial investors become more cautious, investors such as CDC will remain." Really? In the area where experts agree extra investment makes the most difference to the world's poorest, ie agriculture, CDC has scarpered. Its investments have fallen from around 40 percent of its funds to 6 percent.

"It's not charity and it's not aid. But it certainly helps," says Laing. It certainly does. Thanks to huge profits made after deserting the poorest, he enjoys a £1m-a-year pay package.

● *Read the full background to the Actis-CDC scandal at* www.private-eye.co.uk.

POLICE 5

Blair deal

AS SIR Ian Blair contemplates premature departure from the Met and negotiates a no doubt generous severance package, perhaps he should reflect on his role in the shoddy saga of a police officer who was unlawfully forced into early retirement more than 20 years ago but has yet to receive a penny.

Gordon Warren spent 30 years as a patrolling bobby on the beat. In April 1982 he was doing precisely that when he declined to attend "a treat for boys" – an all-night party of booze and blue movies – organised by his inspector at Sutton police station, Geoffrey Bourne-Taylor (see *Eyes passim*).

That night PC Warren was the only officer from the station out fighting crime. Perversely, it was to cost him his job. Bourne-Taylor was evidently not a man to be crossed; and supported by his superintendent and a former chief medical officer, Dr Charles Bott, he declared that PC Warren was mentally unstable and in 1986 forced him to retire – an action later judged unlawful by the high court.

In 1998, the Met eventually offered Mr Warren £85,000 compensation – an offer he rejected on the grounds that it did not cover his £30,000 legal costs, pension rights and salary, not to mention 16 years of suffering.

In 2004, after Mr Warren's MP, Tom Brake, raised his case in parliament, the then Met commissioner, Sir John Stevens, ordered his then deputy, one Ian Blair, to review the case. Blair's said there was no point re-opening matters already explored by the courts and merely repeated the offer of £85,000 that had been made six years earlier. With it came an ultimatum. He wrote: "If it [*the offer*] is not accepted within 28 days, it will be withdrawn and no further correspondence will be entered into, nor any communication accepted by this service... any letters received will not be acknowledged and telephone calls will be promptly terminated."

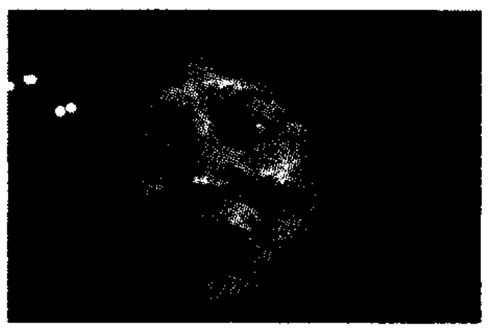
No disciplinary action was ever taken against Bourne-Taylor and his blue movie party pals, nor any of those responsible for subsequently hounding out Mr Warren. He still has not settled his dispute with the Met and Tom Brake is still on the case, about to remind everyone of the saga that still stains Knacker's reputation.

RACE DISCRIMINATION

CPS in the dock

FOR any government body to be accused by a judge of "deceit at the heart of the proceedings" is bad enough. When that body is the crown prosecution service (CPS), it should send shivers through the criminal justice system.

Last month an employment tribunal awarded aggravated damages to a senior crown prosecutor, Halima Aziz (pictured), an Asian Muslim who had fought for nearly seven years for an apology from the CPS for racial discrimination which wrecked her career. While her record award – a total of £600,000, coupled with hundreds of thousands in costs – attracted media coverage, the damning detail of the judgement did not. Not least, according to tribunal judge Dr I. Watt, that more than £1m of taxpayers' money had been "wasted for the want of an apology".



Dr Watt also concluded that despite the court of appeal upholding the discrimination findings two years ago, the CPS was still in a state of denial. No one had been disciplined, let alone offered training or guidance. Indeed, those central to the case, and some involved in subsequent investigations, had been promoted – one had even received an OBE. CPS chief executive Peter Lewis himself had conducted an inquiry which exonerated the main protagonists and effectively "whitewashed" both the tribunal and subsequent court of appeal finding of discrimination.

The seven-year saga was extraordinary. Ms Aziz, then 43, was a senior prosecutor with a reputation for hard work and "an exceptionally effective performance". On the basis of nothing more than rumours in September 2001 that off-the-cuff comments about being treated like a sister of Osama bin Laden following the 9/11 atrocities had triggered race riots in Bradford (they patently had not and the simplest of checks would have discovered that), Ms Aziz was suspended.

Even though there were doubts about the allegations within days, she was not reinstated but was instead transferred. Six months later, even after a formal investigation cleared her of any wrongdoing, there was still no apology and no withdrawal of the allegations – merely a statement that no further action would be taken.

All could and should have been avoided by one simple check following the allegations against Ms Aziz – an extraordinary lapse. The tribunal said it did not believe the CPS witnesses who had claimed the issue of race never crossed their minds.

Two years ago, following appeals, the tribunal's findings of discrimination were eventually upheld by the appeal court. But Lewis chose to ignore the appeal judges' findings, saying he found "no evidence of racism". Curiously, he reported that the main protagonists were simply following an "unwritten" (though he claimed not secret) policy and procedure. However, the entire case presented at tribunal and to the court of appeal had been based upon the *written* and agreed code of conduct. This, said the tribunal, made it "highly probable" that the CPS had knowingly withheld material facts from the tribunal and the appeal court.

"For any respondent to do this is deplorable," the tribunal said. "For the CPS to do this is utterly astonishing. The claimant has had to endure some six years' litigation with deceit at the heart of the proceedings."

The tribunal said it was extraordinary that Lewis was not called to the remedies hearing to deal with the questions over policy arising from his report. He was, the tribunal said, "conspicuous by his absence".

The tribunal recommended that the CPS furnish Ms Aziz with a "genuine" apology acknowledging that she suffered unlawful discrimination; that staff involved are given training and guidance; and that she is given help and support to return to work. But it added: "The tribunal is not remotely convinced even at this stage that the respondent is at all contrite."

It might be right. Asked about the catalogue of criticisms levelled at the service, the CPS said: "The CPS accepts the recommendations made by the employment tribunal and will be implementing them as a matter of priority. We offer a full apology to Halima Aziz."

But it added: "The CPS does not accept certain elements of the judgment in relation to its conduct of the litigation and the internal investigation following the decision of the court of appeal. On those elements it is seeking a review and appeal." Thus wasting even more taxpayers' money.

MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE

Ray of hope

HOW much more slowly can the wheels of justice grind? Raymond Gilbert (pictured) has now served 27 years in prison for the stabbing of a Liverpool betting shop manager, John Suffield – a crime few outside the criminal justice system believe he committed.

Gilbert, poorly educated and with learning difficulties and disabilities, was 22 when he was jailed for life solely because of his own confession – a confession extracted by police over two days of aggressive interrogation without access to a lawyer or anyone else. With no other corroboration, such dubious confession evidence would not be allowed in a criminal court today.

Eight years ago the court of appeal freed Gilbert's co-accused, John Kamara, whom Gilbert had wrongly implicated (*Eye* 1002). The appeal judges were concerned that documents – many helpful to the defence – had been withheld. One was from a witness who saw a van draw up outside the betting office and four men, armed with something like a pickaxe handle, enter the betting shop. There was also a fierce altercation over an unpaid bet in the shop the day before the murder, in which a man (not Kamara or Gilbert) had threatened to return to "sort out" Mr Suffield.

The problem for Gilbert was that during the pair's trial in 1981, Gilbert had suddenly changed his plea to guilty in a misguided attempt to secure Kamara's acquittal.

Despite the multiple stab wounds of the victim, there was nothing to link Gilbert to the crime scene. No murder weapon was found and he was not picked out on an identification parade. He was originally given an alibi by his girlfriend, Joyce Banham. However, during the two-day questioning police told Gilbert she had withdrawn it: but this was not true. She only withdrew the alibi later after she herself had been detained for seven days and threatened with criminal charges.

Gilbert's confession was also full of inconsistencies about the safe, the weapon and how the pair had supposedly forced their way into the betting shop.

Because Gilbert has always protested his innocence, he has never qualified for parole and has now served 12 years longer than the "tariff" suggested by the trial judge.

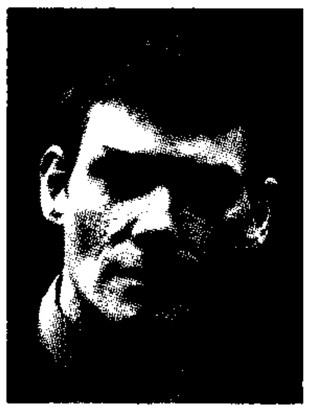
The criminal cases review commission (CCRC) has now finally agreed to conduct a full investigation into Gilbert's conviction, after receiving a new dossier of submissions from his solicitor, Campbell Malone, including new expert evidence about his fragile mental state. Exhibits and evidence gathered during the investigation are now likely to be subject to new forensic examination. With a conviction built on sand, the application is even supported by the victim Mr Suffield's father, who fears that the wrong man has been locked up for his son's murder.

EXTRADITION

Geek tragedy

SIMON Baron-Cohen, professor of developmental psychopathology at Cambridge University, does not normally intervene in espionage cases. The world's leading authority on autism is more accustomed to dealing with the health service than the security service.

Yet the professor's diagnosis of Gary McKinnon (pictured) is the last best hope the 42-year-old Scot has of avoiding a long spell in a US prison that his mother and friends fear will kill him.



The media has turned McKinnon into an international man of mystery. According to the BBC he is "the biggest military hacker of all time". According to the American authorities, he is a sinister technical genius who damaged 92 computers belonging to the United States army, navy, air force, department of defence and Nasa. According to everyone who knows him, they are talking unmitigated tosh.

Rather than being a brilliant code-breaker, McKinnon is a lonely, slightly potty man who would sit quietly listening to his friends rabbiting on in north London pubs and then go home and play on his computer. He didn't even have broadband. When the supposedly greatest hacker of all time broke into the supposedly best-protected systems in the world, he used a dial-up 56k modem to connect to the net (the ones that make high-pitched squeaks and burrs, remember?)

Jon Taylor, an old drinking chum of McKinnon, told the *Eye* that far from being the dupe of Russian, Chinese or Islamist propaganda, McKinnon had been influenced by the ramblings of *The X Files* and 9/11 "truthers".

"He just sat in a daze looking for evidence that UFOs had landed on earth," Taylor said. "He got into the Pentagon on many, many occasions. He said it was very easy, 'more like logging on than hacking in'. If you have a password you are ahead of where much of the Pentagon security was at this stage.

"Gary left messages on screens saying such things as 'your security is really crap'. He also left messages expressing his thoughts on the Iraq War. He just wanted to discover and tell the truth, to tell the US their system was, well, shite at best, and express his feelings regarding US foreign policy."

You'd have thought the Pentagon might have been grateful to have a harmless obsessive revealing the flaws in its security. Not so. McKinnon faces extradition to a court in Virginia, where the maximum penalty for his alleged crimes will be 70 years in prison if convicted.

With an appeal to the European court of human rights his last legal option, his distraught mother turned to Baron-Cohen. The professor bore out what she and McKinnon's friends thought: he was suffering from Asperger Syndrome, Baron-Cohen said. His inability to grasp normal rules of social behaviour explained his crime and meant locking him up in a tough US prison could be the end of him.

In a long memo to the home office, Baron-Cohen said that McKinnon had no understanding of the legal or political consequences of what he had done.

"The fact that he left notes on the computers he hacked into, telling the users that their security was useless, shows that he was also wanting to alert the authorities that they needed to improve their security," he wrote.

"Mr McKinnon's current mental state is, from his parents' report, one of great emotional distress, fear and anxiety, and occasional depression. He fears he will be sent to prison, possibly in the US, and he has even felt suicidal. His parents report that he does not have the social skills to be able to cope with prison, which would be the most traumatic environment for a person with Asperger Syndrome to be in."

There is an alternative. McKinnon's crimes were committed in Britain. If he were tried and convicted here, as Israeli hackers into the Pentagon system were tried in Tel Aviv, autistic charities would help to supervise a community sentence.

There seems little chance of that. The British judicial system is no more willing to try British hackers than it is to try British fraudsters. As with the Enron Three and Conrad Black, it washes its hands of them and sends them to America, even though, unlike the Enron Three and Black, Gary McKinnon has never harmed a soul.

'Ratbiter'

CONSULTANTS

Heads they win, tails they win too

SHADOW chancellor George Osborne cannot have been serious when he told the Tory party conference faithful: "In the private sector when times are tough you take out the overheads. The consultants are sent packing and the advertising budget is cut. Government should do the same."

For while he was promising to get the suits out of government (he also promised to slash planning consultancy costs and use the savings to cut council tax) on the conference fringe the suits themselves were paying to help get the Tories *into* government!

Managements consultants from PricewaterhouseCoopers sponsored a meeting called "Preparing for power", paying for the hall, the croissants and the orange juice. The meeting, addressed by shadow minister Francis Maude, described the "implementation team" he runs to prepare shadow ministers for government. PwC also happens to support this team and, according to the electoral commission, has this year given the Tories £93,000 worth of staff and technical support. This included working directly in Osborne's office, according to the MP's register of interests.

Thanks to its support for the Tories, PwC got to put its man David Allen on the podium alongside Maude, who offered his generous thanks.

Allen suggested two changes to the way the Tories should use consultants. He said they should not "run things" or "be used to operate processes". Instead they should be used to help make changes, but never as a substitute for civil servants. This argument seemed less than convincing after Norfolk South MP Richard Bacon pointed out from the floor that PwC staff did indeed substitute for civil servants. In fact PwC consultant Richard Abadie had been the head of PFI policy at the treasury on secondment for more than two years. Abadie finally returned to PWC last year, only to be replaced by another secondee from rival Deloitte. So treasury PFI policy is actually run by outsiders.

Maude seemed surprised by the revelation and promised to "look into it". But PwC's Allen merely made matters worse by stating: "Yes, we second people. We seconded Richard to the treasury at salary cost or less. It's a way of getting experience and improving our relations with government. I make no bones about that." All of which suggests PwC's support for the Tories is as naked an attempt to get a foot in the door as Andersen Consulting's work with Labour before the 1997 election (*Eyes passim*).

Allen also suggested government should avoid "big IT systems" and "don't go for these big technology solutions which in my experience don't work". He should know. PwC is part of the Sirius consortium which has received hundreds of thousands of pounds to advise on the biggest IT system of all: the ID card scheme nobody wants.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£250bn Loan guarantees extended by government to banks, in return for which PM guarantees that 'the days of big bonuses are over'

£250k Pay-off Peter Mandelson will receive for leaving European commission and becoming minister with duty to ensure this happens

In the Back continues overleaf ➤

HEALTH CHECK

SERIAL CHIEF EXECS

Mr & Mrs Smith

HEALTH watchdogs in Leicester have finally won their battle to find out how much taxpayers' money was paid for the temporary services of hospital supremo Derek Smith – a thumping £173,750 for six-and-a-half months' work, or £6,205 a week (see *Eye* 1214).

But was he worth the money? Smith landed the temporary contract to run the University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust after the hasty exit of Peter Reading, who took early retirement after a £700m plan to transform the city's three hospitals was dumped.

Smith's pay went to the consultancy firm Durrow (which, coincidentally, he had brought in as consultants when he was chief executive of Hammersmith Hospitals). On its books, both now and then, was none other than Smith's wife, Ruth Harrison, who quit the NHS and her job as chief executive of South Bucks Hospitals Trust days before the health commission published a devastating report into the deaths of 65 and infection of 334 patients from *Clostridium difficile* over three years at Stoke Mandeville hospital.

But Leicester is not the only cash-strapped trust paying for a costly serial freelance chief exec. Bromley Hospitals Trust is paying its "interim" chief executive Michael Marchment £1,200 a day – equivalent to an annual salary of £270,000 – since he stepped in in mid-June. That is in fact £100 a day less than his immediate predecessor, Ian Wilson, who held the reins for almost seven months. Before him, the peripatetic hospital "turnaround" expert Anthony Sumara held the post for six months (for an undisclosed fee) in addition to his director post with NHS London.

The trust has been without a permanent chief executive since John Watkinson left in December 2006 when the trust had an accumulated debt of £87m. Last month an independent report into the financial mess catalogued a series of management and financial failings under his tenure. The report questioned his approach to financial management and unprofessional behaviour among certain subordinates. As he joined the Royal Cornwall Hospital NHS trust at the beginning of 2007 to help turn around its own multi-million pound deficit, he has now been suspended while his record in his new job is under review.

COMPETITION

Fair shares

DID health minister Ben Bradshaw pick the right person for the job when last month he asked Lord Carter to chair the new NHS Cooperation and Competition Panel?

The panel is supposed to ensure that competition for NHS contracts between NHS hospitals and private providers is "fair and transparent". Up to now, for example, private firms running NHS independent sector treatment centres (ISTCs) have had unfair advantages. In order to "encourage" the growth of a new market, the government paid more per operation to private providers.

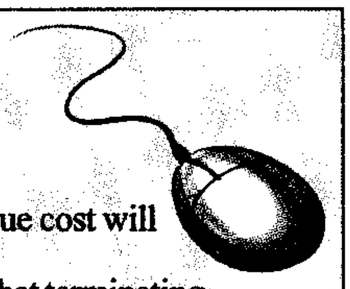
But will Patrick Carter restore the balance? It seems unlikely. For the man who has a long-running personal friendship with Labour (best man at both of Jack Straw's weddings) also has a long and lucrative involvement with private healthcare.

Carter made millions by founding and then selling the private firm Westminster Healthcare; and he is currently a director of computer firm McKesson, which is contracted to the NHS. Last October the government put it on a list of "approved providers" to help the NHS "commission services", even though not all McKesson's services have worked well in the past (it lost contracts at Norfolk and Edinburgh hospitals after complaints about performance).

Nevertheless Carter's firm still gets paid to help privatise bits of the NHS while one of its bosses is now an official judge of when and how services should be privatised.

I.T.

Game, reset, match



AS BELTS tighten around the country, the spending of taxpayers' money on rubbishy IT projects knows no limits.

Figures released by health minister Ben Bradshaw over the summer reveal that the key contracts to install new software across the NHS under the "national programme for IT" have escalated in value from those advertised.

The big leap is in the cost of the IT "spine" that will form the controversial national health database. The contract with BT was originally valued at £620m, but in the course of "reset" negotiations has risen 60 percent to, ahem, £1bn.

Five regional monopoly supplier contracts, handed to "local service providers" BT, Accenture, CSC and Fujitsu, have also been "reset" with a £630m price hike to £5.62bn. £200m was down to the contract for southern England, from which Fujitsu was ejected recently. This is good news for BT, as the company sniffs around Fujitsu's old patch, and for the many former influential health service figures now on BT's payroll. These include Sir Jonathan Michael, former chief executive of Guy's and St Thomas's who now runs BT's efforts as London local service provider; and Patricia Hewitt, until last year the health secretary who did so much to promote the failing programme.

The latest increases will take the official £12.4bn national programme price tag even higher. Some experts estimate that when the expense to NHS trusts of implementing the invariably disaster-prone IT systems is included, the true cost will top £30bn.

Bradshaw also revealed that terminating Fujitsu's contract leaves taxpayers liable for up to £500m in compensation, though given the company's pisspoor performance, the lawyers are likely to argue that nothing is due or that money should move the other way.

Either way, the huge underperforming regional monopoly contracts – from another of which Accenture walked away two years ago – have proved massive millstones. But what of the man whose idea they were, the head of the national programme who resigned last year, Richard Granger? In his smartest move to date, Granger has decamped to Australia and a job with KPMG's "global health" practice.

● CONNECTING for Health may be an expensive disaster for the NHS, but it is certainly helping the finances of former health minister Lord Warner.

Warner, who was in charge of the NHS IT programme until December 2006, now has a new job advising Perot Systems, won a £108m contract to work on Connecting for Health as a subcontractor to BT.

Latest trials in London hospitals showed the system has lost patient records, potentially putting patients in danger. This must be a matter of concern for the chairman of the NHS London Provider Agency, which is tasked with improving London hospital performance. His name? Er, Lord Warner.

MEDICINE BALLS

Trust me, I'm a lumberjack

WHAT is the best way to provide out-of-hours (OOH) care to remote areas?

The people of Kinloch Rannoch in Tayside have been facing this conundrum ever since their GP opted out of OOH two and a half years ago and then retired. Their preferred option is to have GP cover restored; but despite repeated promises from their health board, this has yet to materialise.

Now Tayside health board has a new plan: to use a company called First Response to find and train local volunteers to provide out-of-hours care. At a recent meeting, residents were told: "The company will operate a 12-person volunteer scheme with initial set up costs of £15,000 funded through community and charitable donations." So the people of Kinloch Rannoch are expected not only to raise the funds, but also to staff their own OOH service.

Can a local volunteer with five days' training and neither medical nor paramedic qualifications, substitute for GP care? Can a tooled-up pump attendant or logger deal with subarachnoid haemorrhage, status epilepticus, anaphylaxis, meningococcal meningitis, acute bronchiolitis or any of the rare but life-threatening conditions that require swift diagnosis and intervention?

Tayside health board says it cannot afford, and hasn't the staff, to provide full out-of-hours services to all. But the issue of providing care to small populations living in very remote and rural communities is not new. However, it requires cooperation and collaboration rather than privatisation and deregulation. Other remote areas of Scotland (and the rest of the UK) still seem able to provide out-of-hours cover, so it isn't impossible.

In July, Nicola Sturgeon, the Scottish health minister, received a standing ovation from the BMA when she promised to keep general practice services in the public domain and out of commercial corporations, working to reintegrate all services in the NHS. This doesn't seem to apply to rural communities. Residents in these areas are typically robust and resilient; but there are times when you need to see a doctor quickly, and not a lumberjack with a five-day medical degree.

● M.D. bumped into Dame Carol Black last week, who pointed out that she had no part in the suspension of junior doctor Ian MacKay (see last *Eye* and Letters this issue) and although his email was far more offensive than just calling her a "shit", she thought the suspension was inappropriate.

Dame Carol also stressed that after the junior doctor job application fiasco last year, there were plenty of jobs that were vacant this year. Not enough junior doctors want to be obstetricians or psychiatrists, and no one would travel to Newcastle to pursue a urology career. She also gave short shrift to a parent who had written to her complaining that his junior doctor son and girl-friend couldn't get a job in the same area. She answered in one line: "We're not a dating agency."

Meanwhile, nurses are taking over the NHS. M.D. met a 150 fertility nurses who run NHS and private units up and down the country, with just a few doctors for support. They do high-tech procedures (egg harvesting and transfer, testicular biopsy), often better than doctors and for less money. As one sister put it: "I refuse to train junior doctors if they clearly haven't got enough hand-eye co-ordination." Doctors may turn down jobs they don't fancy but there are plenty of nurses (and lumberjacks) desperate for work.

M.D.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017 or email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk

In the City

ONE OF those keeping an eye on developments at the Royal Bank of Scotland is the phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed.

RBS is Fayed's main banker and Fayed family companies are among its biggest borrowers, with £650m secured on Harrods and other properties. The ten-year loan was made in December 2006, refinancing an earlier, £348m RBS loan. Given the fall in commercial property values, the loan-to-value of such a trophy asset may be less attractive than RBS may now wish.

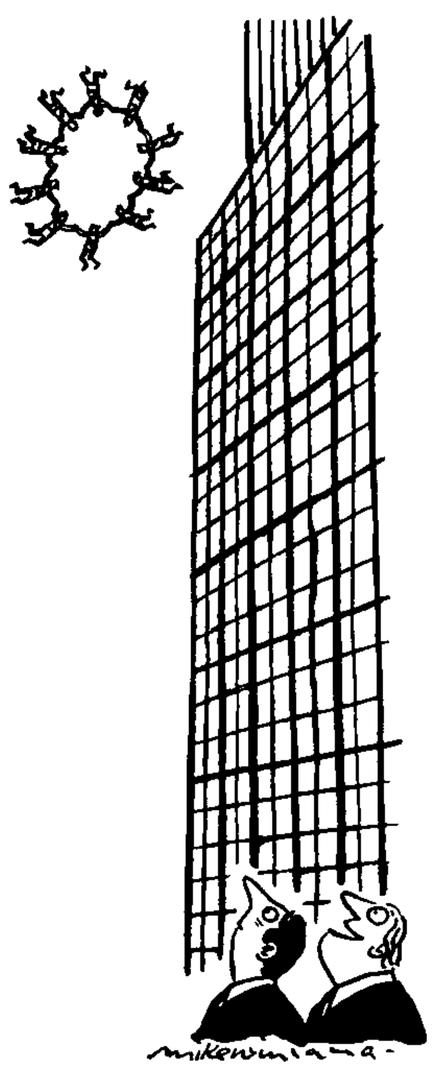
That is not RBS's only exposure to Fayed, though. The bank also has a loan outstanding secured on the Paris Ritz, £86m at the last count and due for repayment next May. Fayed has been looking to refinance a bigger RBS loan to also pay for renovation but it is not clear yet whether he has succeeded. So the taxpayer will now, through the partially nationalised RBS, have a £15bn to £20bn interest in the fortunes of Harrods and the Ritz, which is something Gordon Brown may not have anticipated – like being concerned in the future of Liverpool FC (see below).

With perhaps his bankers in mind, the latest Harrods Holdings accounts to February 2008 show that Fayed and his family took a cut in dividend – contrary to some of the reports which surrounded the results from the store. Holdings paid a £30m dividend, down from £48.5m in 2007. Such sacrifices might be necessary, given that the store had creditors falling due within the year from February of £121m and the average number of days' bills that were outstanding had jumped from 35 to 43.

Sales at the store were up 11 percent to £437m – not too bad a result. But costs were also up, particularly the much higher rent required to service the bigger RBS loan to the new landlord, another Fayed entity, Harrods Property. Rent went from less than £6m to almost £40m. As a result, operating profits at the store were down from £80m to £50m.

However, largely because interest charges went from £24m to zero due to the RBS loan being switched from Harrods Holdings to a separate entity, Harrods Property, pre-tax profits rose from £43m to £59m.

That rent bill and inflation will be unwanted pressures on Fayed at a time when consumer spending and tourist shoppers are likely to be in decline and the RBS interest bill has to be met. Doubtless the Treasury will be watching closely on the taxpayers' behalf.



"You've got to hand it to Acme Investments, they always have had style"

BANKS from Iceland, Ireland, India, Nigeria and Cyprus who persuaded hundreds of thousands of British savers to deposit billions with them played a system that was open to abuse and was allowed by the Fundamentally Supine Authority to flourish unchecked.

The key to their approach was to dominate the "best rate" lists provided every weekend in the financial pages of national newspapers and on comparison websites. These lists in recent months, if not years, have been dominated by two Icelandic banks – Landsbanki and Kaupthing – as well as Anglo Irish, ICICI from India and First Bank of Nigeria's First Save.

These banks and others were allowed to advertise aggressively for deposits because they had either joined the Financial Services Compensation Scheme or were covered by compensation schemes in their European homelands. But these schemes often offered less than the UK equivalent and any claim had to go there first before you could seek a top-up from the UK scheme, so delay was inevitable.

The FSA regulated banks that were "passported" in from the European Economic Area, which included Iceland, but only the local subsidiary; the parent bank was regulated by their national regulator. The inadequacies of that system have been illustrated in Iceland.

In recent months ICICI and First Bank of Nigeria have been given poor credit ratings. The Indian central bank had to step in last week to prevent a run on ICICI, whose shares have almost halved since late September amid concerns about its overseas exposure.

But poor ratings did not prevent these banks from "buying" deposits by offering more attractive rates to savers who appeared ignorant or uncaring of the basic rule that the higher the return, the greater the risk.

With high-street banks and building societies offering low-interest rates to their customers at a time when inflation was rising, so cutting real returns, the foreign banks realised that the way to build up retail deposits was by ensuring that their products regularly topped the "best rate" lists.

Perhaps after the smoke clears from the current crisis, the FSA and newspapers will review just how those lists work, who is allowed to feature there and whether a "health warning" should be attached pointing out that not all accounts or compensation schemes are equal and there may be a price to pay for chasing higher than average returns. Because the Iceland lesson will soon be forgotten – like that of BCCI.

I-SPY *Barnstaple, N. Devon*

Submitted by Phil Aplin. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

NO SUCH excuse, however, is available to those councils, public bodies and charities with professional advisers who poured almost £1bn into the Icelandic banks.

Even if their treasurers or advisers had forgotten about the 2006 scare – when the stock market fell sharply and so did the currency thanks to fears that the economy was badly overheating – there have been plenty of warnings since the credit crunch hit in June 2007.

The Icelandic krona has been falling all year while inflation has been rising. Interest rates hit 15 percent in March. The spread in credit default swaps rose to 1,000 basis points at one time, indicating that a banking collapse was possible. The *Sunday Telegraph* and *Sunday Times* had both hinted in February at a possible Icelandic meltdown, and in April the credit ratings agency Moody's warned that Iceland's economy looked increasingly vulnerable.

Even though Iceland's three main banks produced better than expected results in the first half of this year, the underlying worries remained about an economy that was run like a hedge fund and was vulnerable to a terminal loss of confidence. Professor Richard Portes, an expert on Iceland, told the *Financial Times* in March: "The question arises whether the banks are not just too big to fail, but also too big to rescue."

Yet such warnings clearly escaped those responsible for public funds who are paid large fees to be informed.

SUGGESTIONS by Serious Farce Office director Richard "Grey Man" Alderman to the *Evening Standard* on 30 September that he might not after all go ahead with the NHS price-fixing case appeal in December produced uproar from those involved with the long-running prosecution. This row lies behind the sudden announcement by the SFO last week that Alderman had authorised the appeal against the trial judge's decision last July to halt proceedings. The appeal had been lodged weeks ago and a hearing date in December set – all with Alderman's knowledge and agreement.

So imagine the surprise and concern when he told the *Standard* that he was still considering whether or not to continue with the appeal and might decide on counsel's advice to drop it. How could such a decision be explained, other than a humiliating climb-down with a huge bill for costs to follow? Alderman was no doubt reminded that both prosecuting counsel and independent counsel have already advised on proceeding with the appeal, so where would this new advice come from?

The SFO announcement says he will "continue to review the case". So if the Appeal Court says the trial can go ahead – next year or in 2010 – it still may not be a certain runner. The reason would be too high a cost and too much uncertainty of conviction. If the judges say no, then Grey Man will no doubt be relieved and he can turn his attention to another long-running and expensive saga, the Iraq oil-for-food corruption investigation, which could also bite the desert dust on similar grounds of excessive cost, time and uncertainty.

PLANET FOOTBALL vs CREDIT CRUNCH

WEST HAM are not the only Premier League club caught up in the Icelandic banking crisis and the credit crunch, confirming the warning from Football Association chairman Lord

☛ *See over...*

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

MAGGIE BRILLIANTLY SCRAPPED MANUFACTURING IN FAVOUR OF DEBT WITH NOTHING BEHIND IT.
IT WAS AN ECONOMIC MIRACLE...
...THAT IT WORKED FOR NEARLY 30 YEARS BEFORE IT BLEW UP IN OUR FACES

Triesman about the dangers to free-spending clubs of their £3bn debts.

Portsmouth and Bolton still have loans or credit facilities outstanding from the Singer & Friedlander subsidiaries of Kaupthing, which was nationalised last week by the Reykjavik government after the Treasury appointed administrators to the UK operations. Fulham has outstanding funding from Fortis, the cross-border bank whose operations have been taken over by the Dutch and Belgian governments, the latter in partnership with the French bank BNP.

RBS has been a major player in football finance, as has Barclays, which is desperately trying to avoid taking the taxpayers' billions. Anglo Irish Bank is a Sunderland supporter but is now reliant on Irish government support.

Like RBS, the US bank Wachovia, rescued by Wells Fargo, is a player in the saga of who will own Liverpool. It partners RBS in a £350m loan to warring partners Tom Hicks and George Gillett.

All banks with loans and overdrafts outstanding to Premier League clubs are likely to be looking where possible to "deleverage" their balance sheets by collecting in cash and restricting lending, especially to borrowers who live beyond their financial means. All but £100m of the Premier League clubs' combined revenues of £1.5bn, mostly from TV and attendances, went on wages, leaving little margin for debt financing at a time when the cost of money has been rising. Clubs will be under growing pressure to cut costs at a time when fans may be unable to afford rising ticket prices and attendances could fall.

Those clubs in full...

ARSENAL – Struggling US monoline insurer AMBAC provided the insurance for a £260m bond issue in 2006, enabling the bonds to get a higher rating at a cheaper cost. Last month Moody's stated it was considering downgrading AMBAC's credit rating. Unknown factors are the impact, if any, of the financial crisis on the club's two big rival shareholders, American Stan Kroenke and Uzbek-born Russian Alisher Usmanov.

BOLTON – Owners Burnden Leisure have received finance from both Kaupthing Singer & Friedlander and more recently Alliance & Leicester, rescued by Spain's Santander.

CHELSEA – Dependent on the Bank of Abramovich, which has been hit by the fall in Russian share prices and may not be so generous in future.

EVERTON – Barclays granted a new £30m overdraft facility last month.

LIVERPOOL – RBS provided a £350m facility in January to Kop Football (Holdings), the vehicle of owners Gillett and Hicks. As part of that deal, Wachovia agreed to provide at least £61m. The RBS facility is due for renewal on 24 January 2009 but can be extended to 24 July. Hicks has already admitted to finding it hard to raise funding in the US.

MANCHESTER CITY – Banking worries were removed by the arrival of Abu Dhabi's royal family, who have huge oil and investment wealth – unlike their equivalents in Dubai, who flirted with Liverpool and are now looking to buy Charlton Athletic. Dubai is a potential second Iceland – overspent and over-borrowed, with few remaining oil reserves to bail it out.

MANCHESTER UNITED – The club with the biggest debt burden after Chelsea. More than £500m is not due until 2013 at the earliest, but control is dependent on the Glazer family being able to repay the hedge fund bondholders in 2010.

NEWCASTLE – Owner Mike Ashley is looking to sell after losing a reputed £300m on HBOS shares and seeing his Sports Direct stake sink in value.

TOTTENHAM – Effective owner Joe Lewis lost $1.14bn on a bad bet on rescued Wall Street investment bankers Bear Stearns.

WEST HAM – Owner Bjorgolfur Gudmundsson was removed as chairman of Landsbanki, in which he was a major shareholder. He is said to be looking to sell.

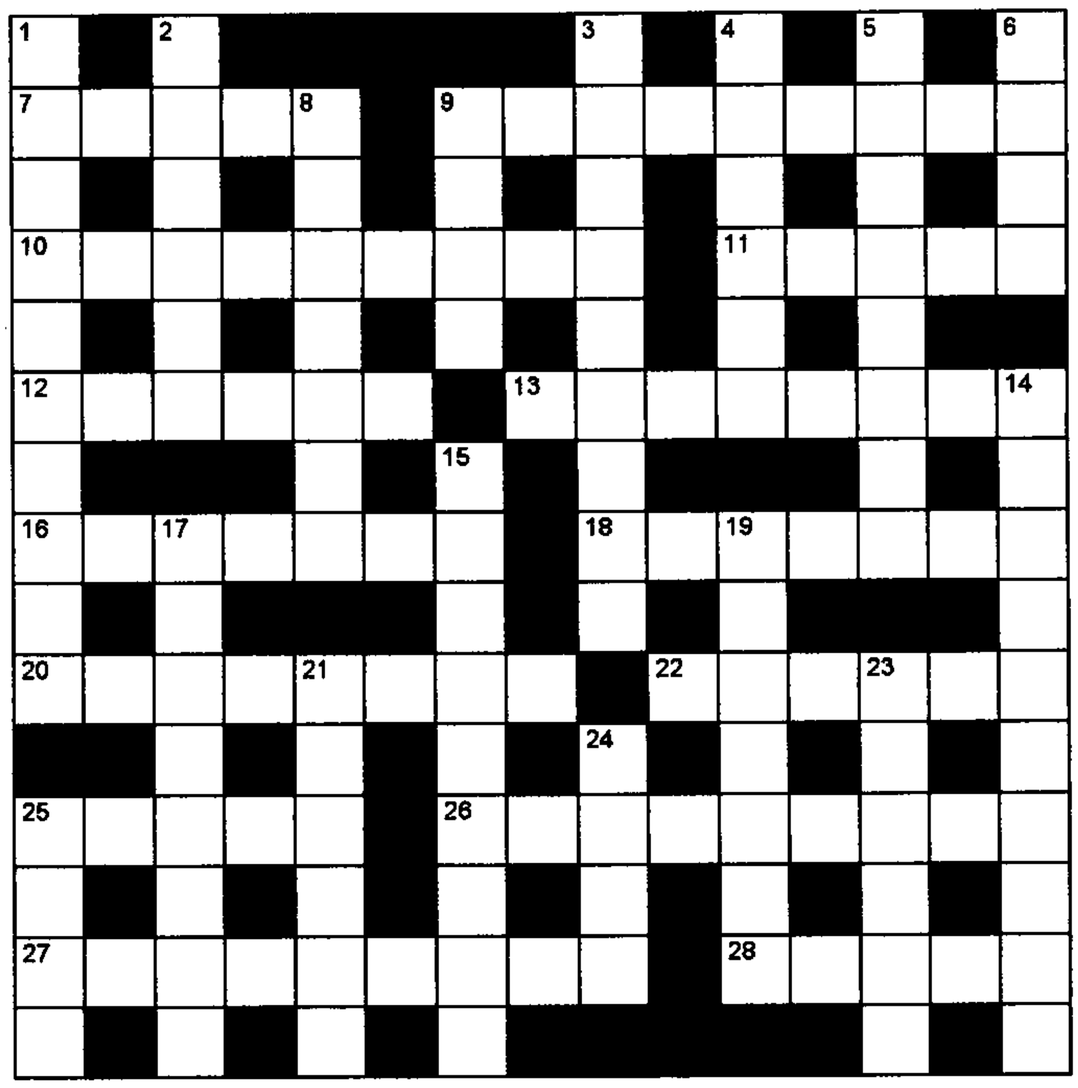
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 376

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 24 October 2008

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

7 Hopper, by the way, provides bird's dropping off place (5)

9 Patsy gives head to old lecher, following direction (9)

10 Penetrator of more than one hole, meerkat's screwed an unknown quantity (6-3)

11 Lecher cosying up to date is not on the level (5)

12/13 So-called leader's crappy mid-term DVD every leader of Republicans ignored (6,8)

16 Come back one second – it'll be the ruin of you (7)

18 A non-PC parent's sort of tart? (7)

20 Marginalize a royal cherishing love crap (8)

22 Students once a Scottish smoker gets in pissed (6)

25 See 6dn.

26 Reasonable capacity of bendy bit of member Heath bent back (5,4)

27 Camp types erection aids (4-5)

28 Some tosser whose deposit is frozen? (5)

DOWN

1 Tantrum-thrower Prince, half cut, married to another pop star (5,5)

2 Art of growth restriction, courtesy of Brown, with resistance lacking, is a hit (6)

3 Payees, say, aroused but far from hard (4-5)

4 Olivier made it with Fonda, very briefly! (5,1)

5 Balls possibly getting in an erect state, handled badly (6,2)

6/25ac. Boss, one who stuffs game (4,5)

8 Male recruited by working girls, for which a minister is responsible (3,4)

9 Drink decarbonised wine on top of drug (4)

14 One who's hailed airline getting army out (6,4)

15 Dicky felt Tess Daly's bottom – sucker! (6,3)

17 No back: very well hidden in skirt but tits on show in this? (8)

19 Blessed, having to drop histrionics initially, was lax (7)

21 Pests taking notes from our versifier on an afterthought (6)

23 Woman acting head off, being a cow (6)

24 Lives disrupted by androgynous bird (4)

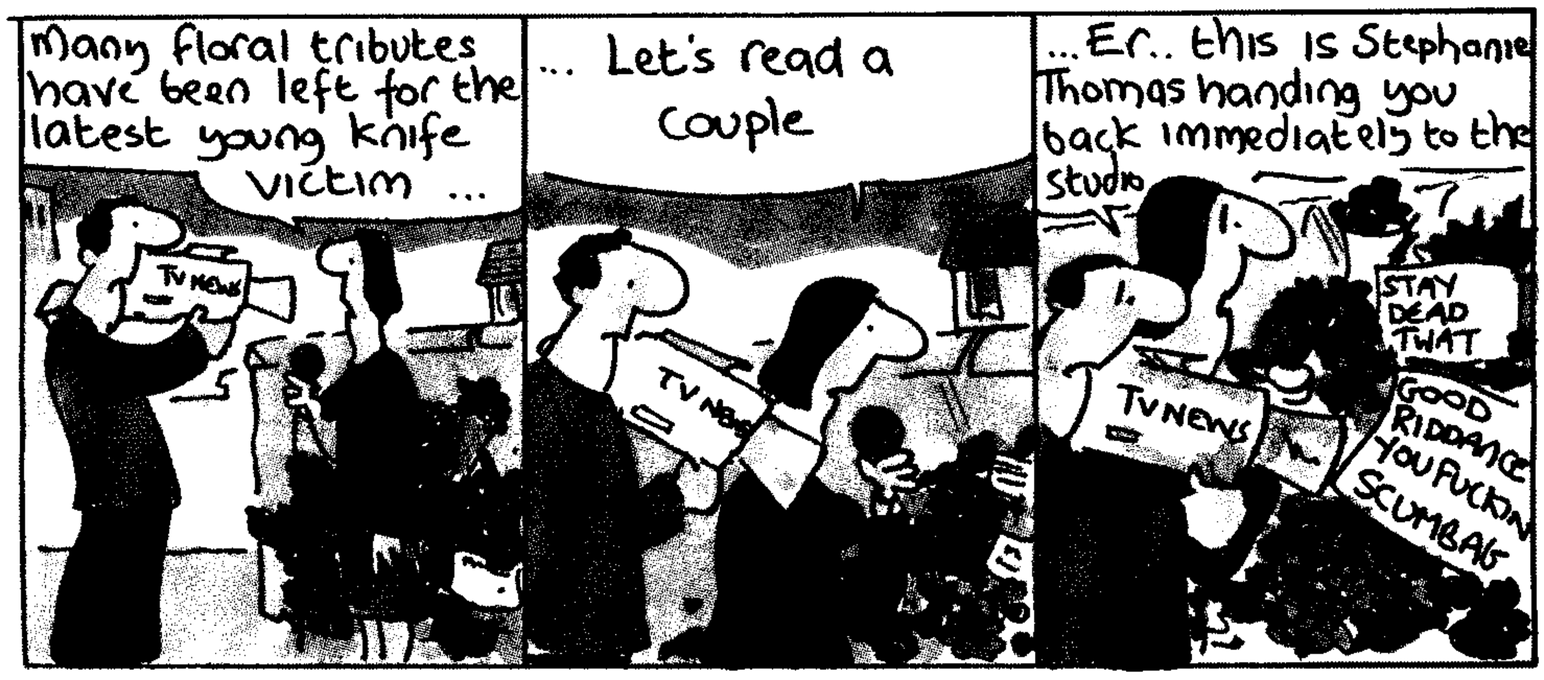
25 Depression time for the PM (4)

Crossword 375 winner: NICK GROGAN

ACROSS: 1 Spaced 5 Powergen 9 Manacles 10 Europe 11/23 Weak spot 12 Backhander 13 Deloused 15 Moonie 17 Upends 19 Lead-free 21 Prosecutor 25 Zagreb 26 Eyeballs 27 Heraldry 28 Dressy.

DOWN: 2 Peace 3 Crackdown 4 Delibes 5 Postcode lottery 6 Wrexham 7 Rerun 8 Expletive 14 Expurgate 16 Obfuscate 18 Sickbed 20 Airhead 22 Syria 24 Ogles.

HUSBAND


Many floral tributes have been left for the latest young knife victim ...
TV News
... Let's read a couple
TV News
...Er.. this is Stephanie Thomas handing you back immediately to the studio
TV News
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GOOD RIDDANCE YOU FUCKIN SCUMBAG

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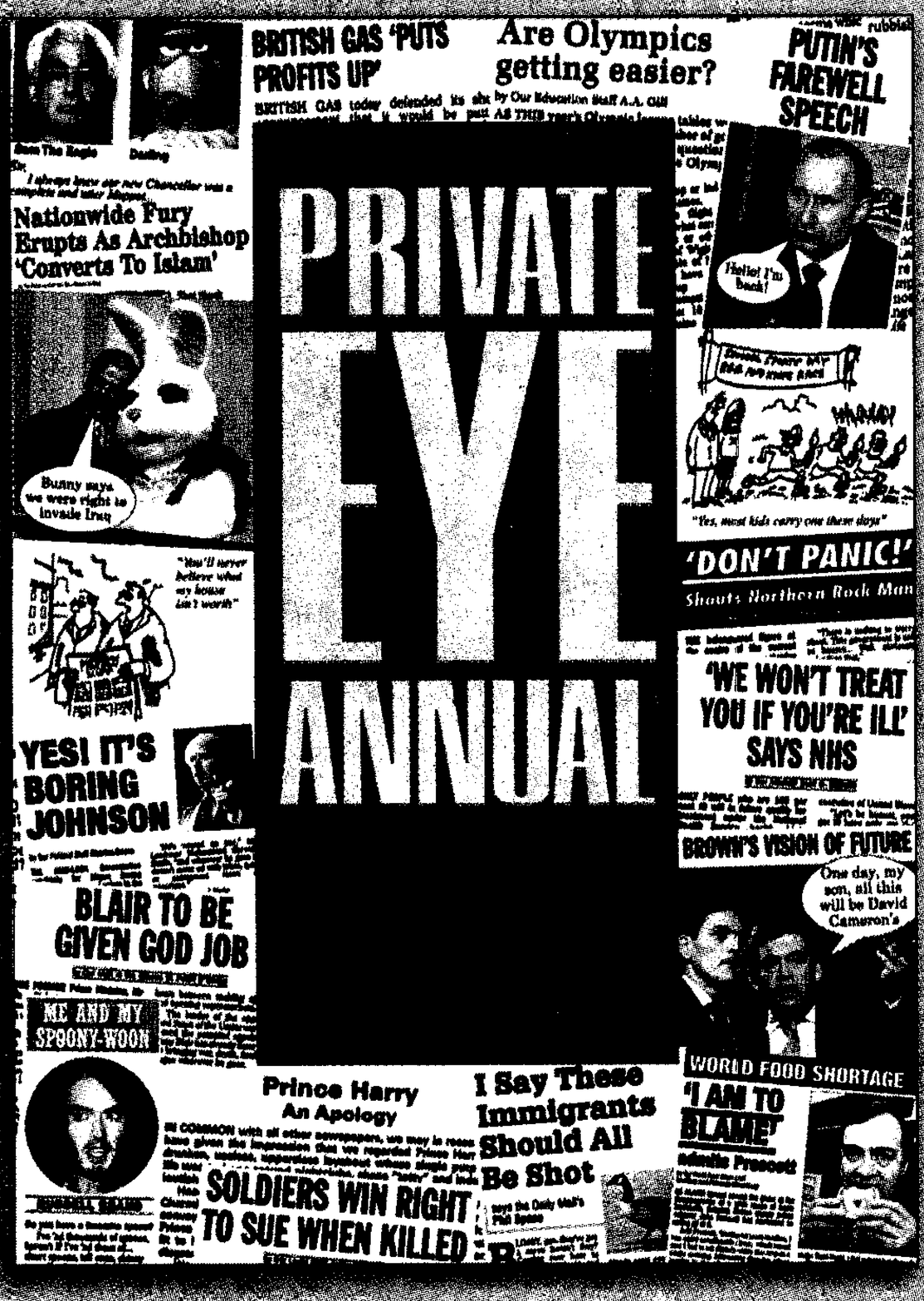
BRITISH GAS 'PUTS PROFITS UP'
Are Olympics getting easier?
PUTIN'S FAREWELL SPEECH
Nationwide Fury Erupts As Archbishop 'Converts To Islam'
Bunny says we were right to invade Iraq
"You'll never believe what my house isn't worth"
YES! IT'S BORING JOHNSON
BLAIR TO BE GIVEN GOD JOB
ME AND MY SPOONY-WOON
PRIVATE EYE ANNUAL
'DON'T PANIC!'
Shouts Northern Rock Man
'WE WON'T TREAT YOU IF YOU'RE ILL' SAYS NHS
BROWN'S VISION OF FUTURE
One day, my son, all this will be David Cameron's
WORLD FOOD SHORTAGE
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I Say These Immigrants Should All Be Shot
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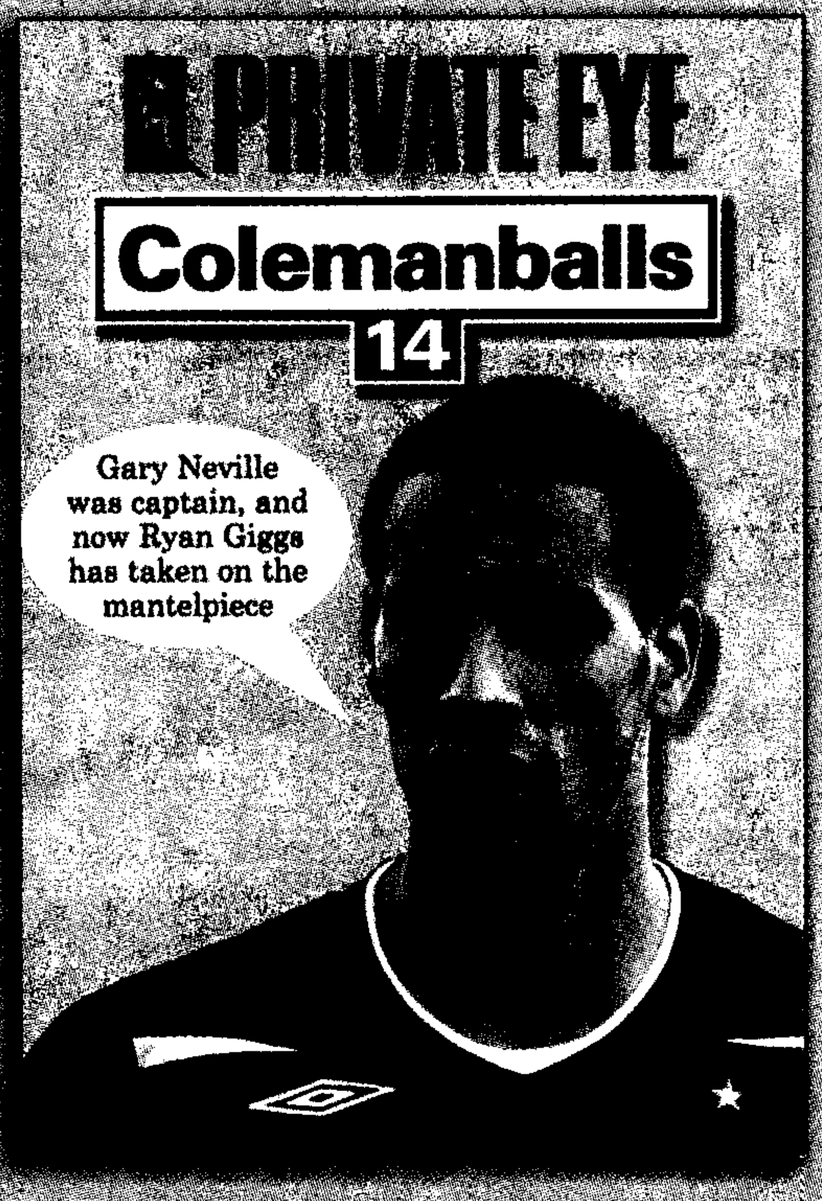

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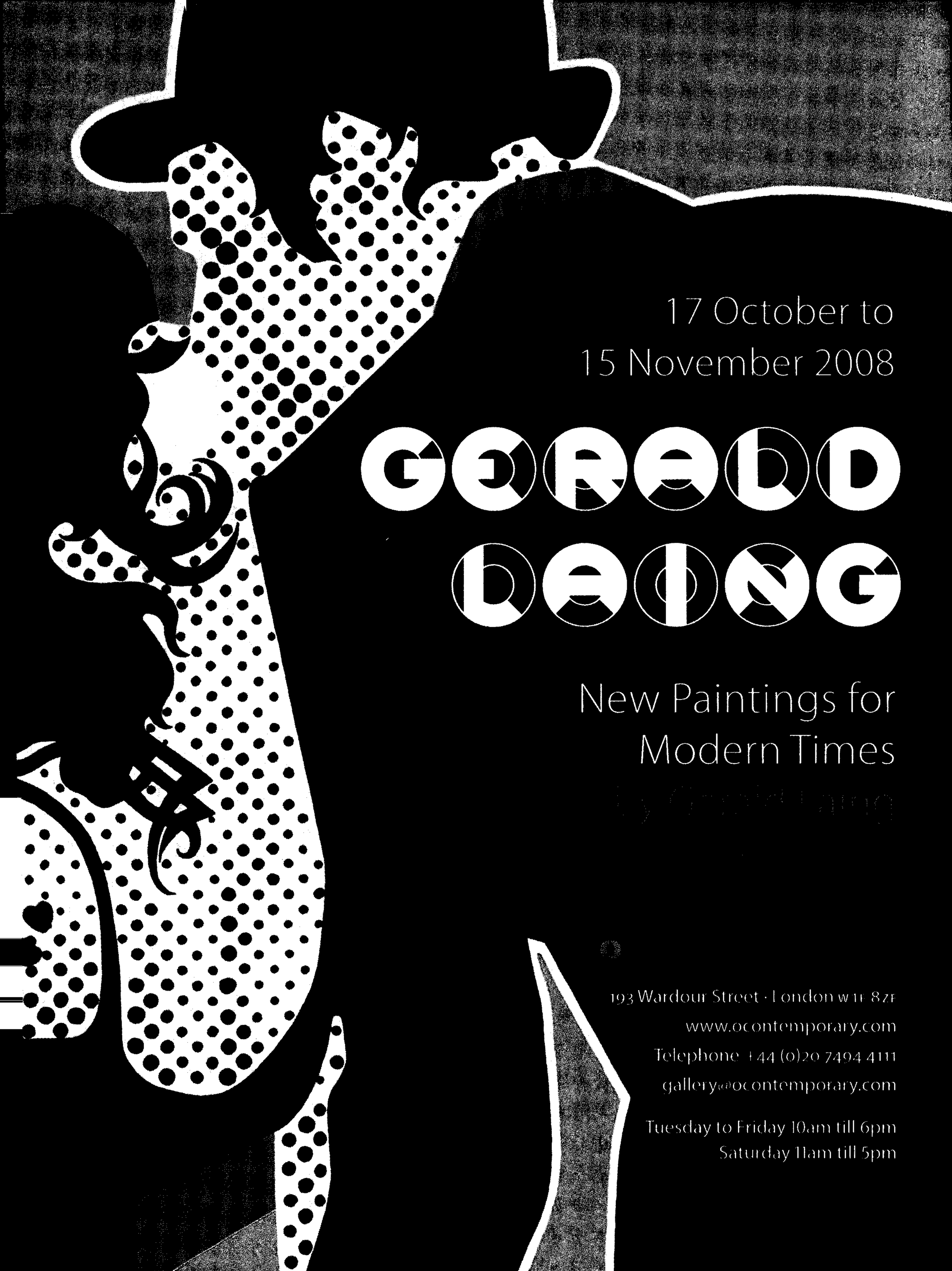

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OM SAI RAM

A fitting end to the ill-fitting British suit

A suitable man to spark a men's clothing revolution

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The British clothing chain store has a lot to fear from ***Mr. Raja M Daswani*** of Kowloon. If there were a global ambassador for men's suiting, Mr Daswani, who owns and runs Hong Kong's biggest tailoring business, would be that man. He and his family team measure and make hundreds of suits a week for discerning clients across the world.

Indeed, so successful is ***Mr. Daswani,*** that – a little unnervingly as he is measuring you up – he freely admits he doesn't really need to work any more. 'My team is as experienced as I am. But I just love men's suits and I wouldn't feel right sitting at home. It's not a business. It's a mission.

'I love seeing customers walk in a really bad suit that cost them a fortune and walk out in one of our suits that's perfect in every way, made with a good heart in a superior fabric for a half or a quarter as much.'

The price of a Daswani shirt and suit are astonishing. We are talking from £19 (£25 including tax and duty) for a custom shirt and £129 (£169 including tax and duty) for a fully lined, made-to measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £250 (£325 including tax and duty) for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from handmade button holes to knee lining. Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500 (£1,950 including tax and duty), costs a third less than it would on **Savile Row**.

Raja Daswani may be based in Hong Kong, but his sartorial mission to the badly dressed and overpaying British customer brings him to the UK as often as once a month. He and his team take over hotel suites in major cities, so British customers can make an appointment and get the full Kowloon Monty.

Measurements and digital photos are taken here and emailed to Hong Kong. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can have it couriered within a week or so, or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

It now remains to see whether the Raja revolution, with its inspired mix of artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology, will see the end of the off-the-peg British chain store suit. On price alone, it's a sartorial solution that will even please the Suits in accounts.

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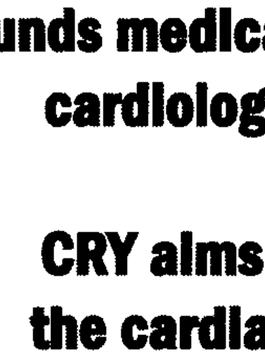

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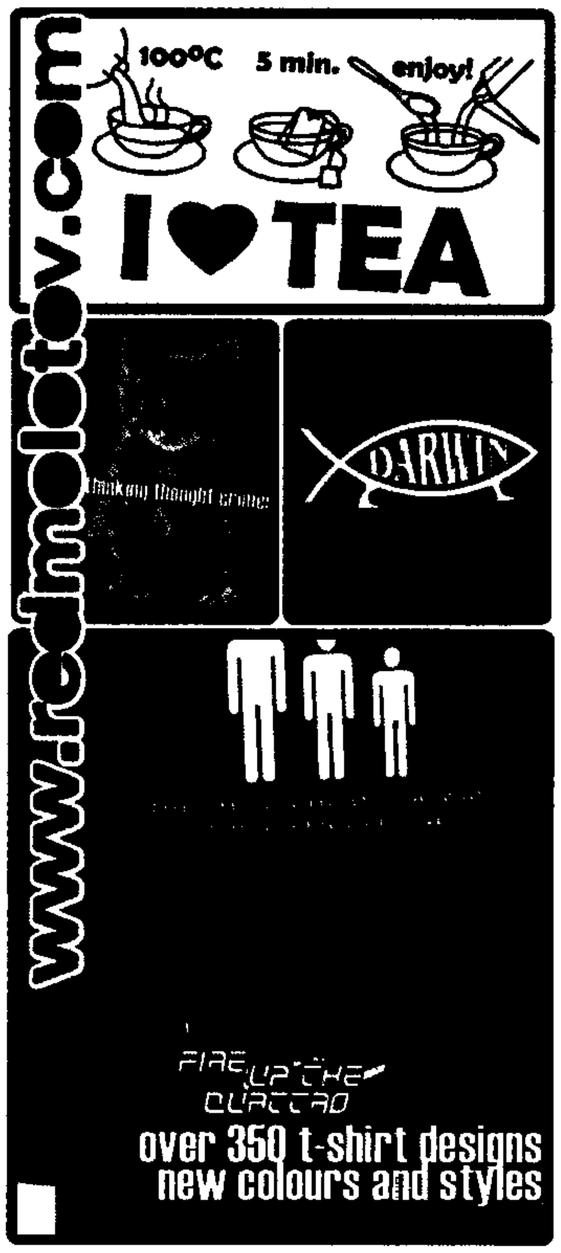

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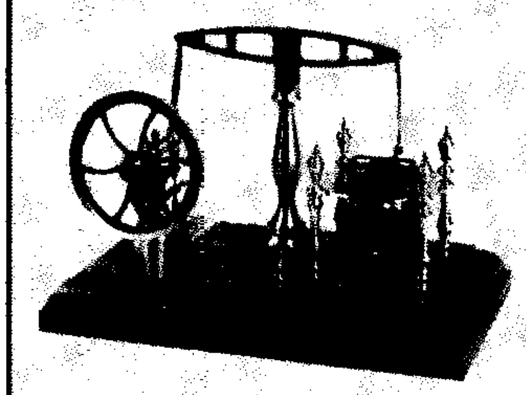

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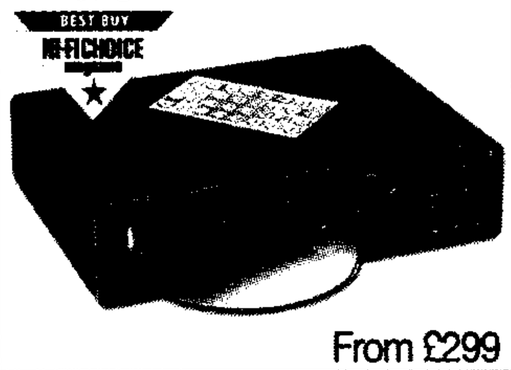

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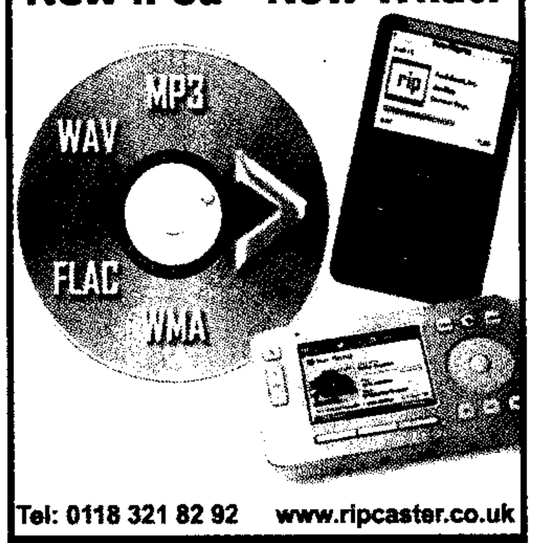

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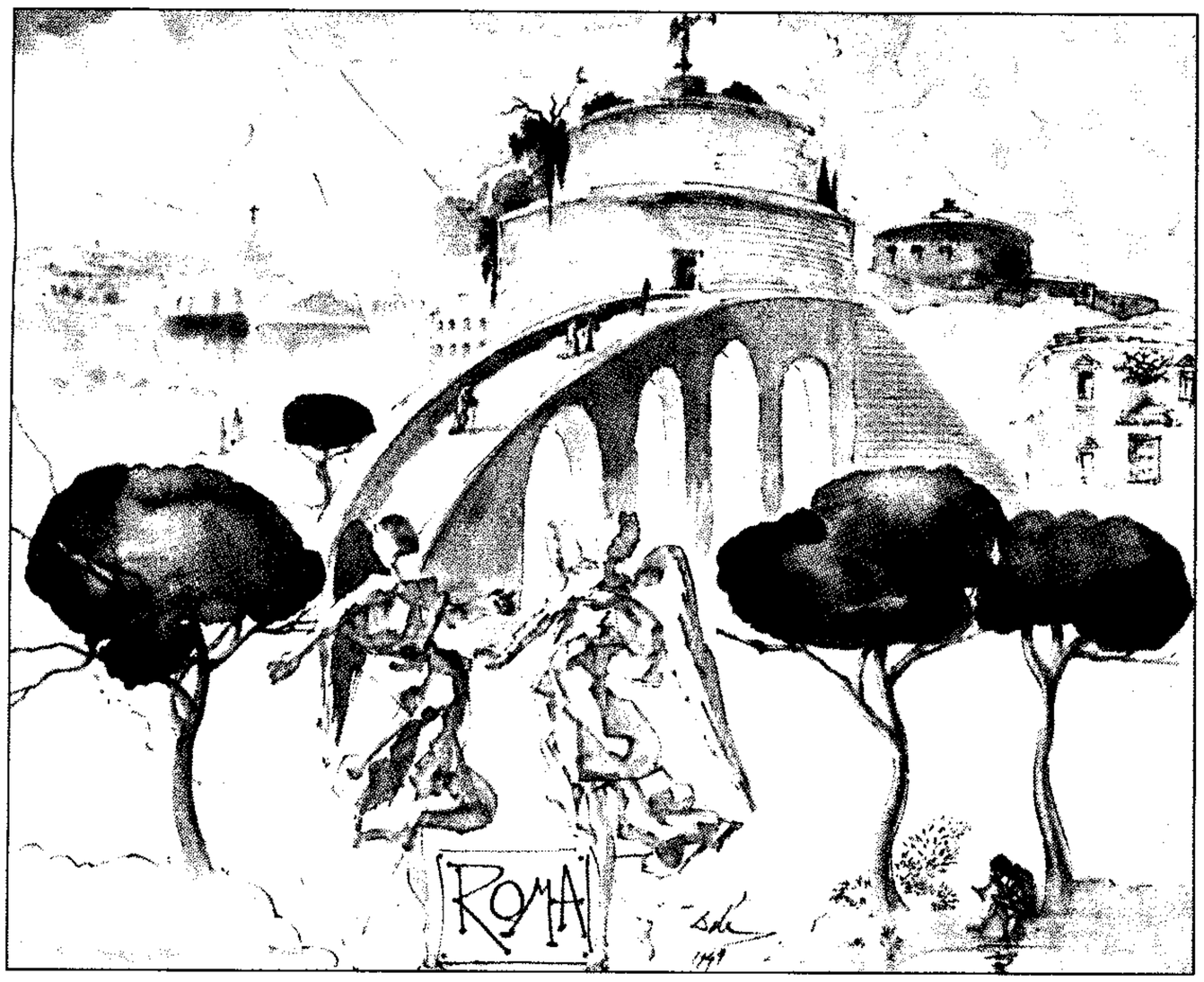

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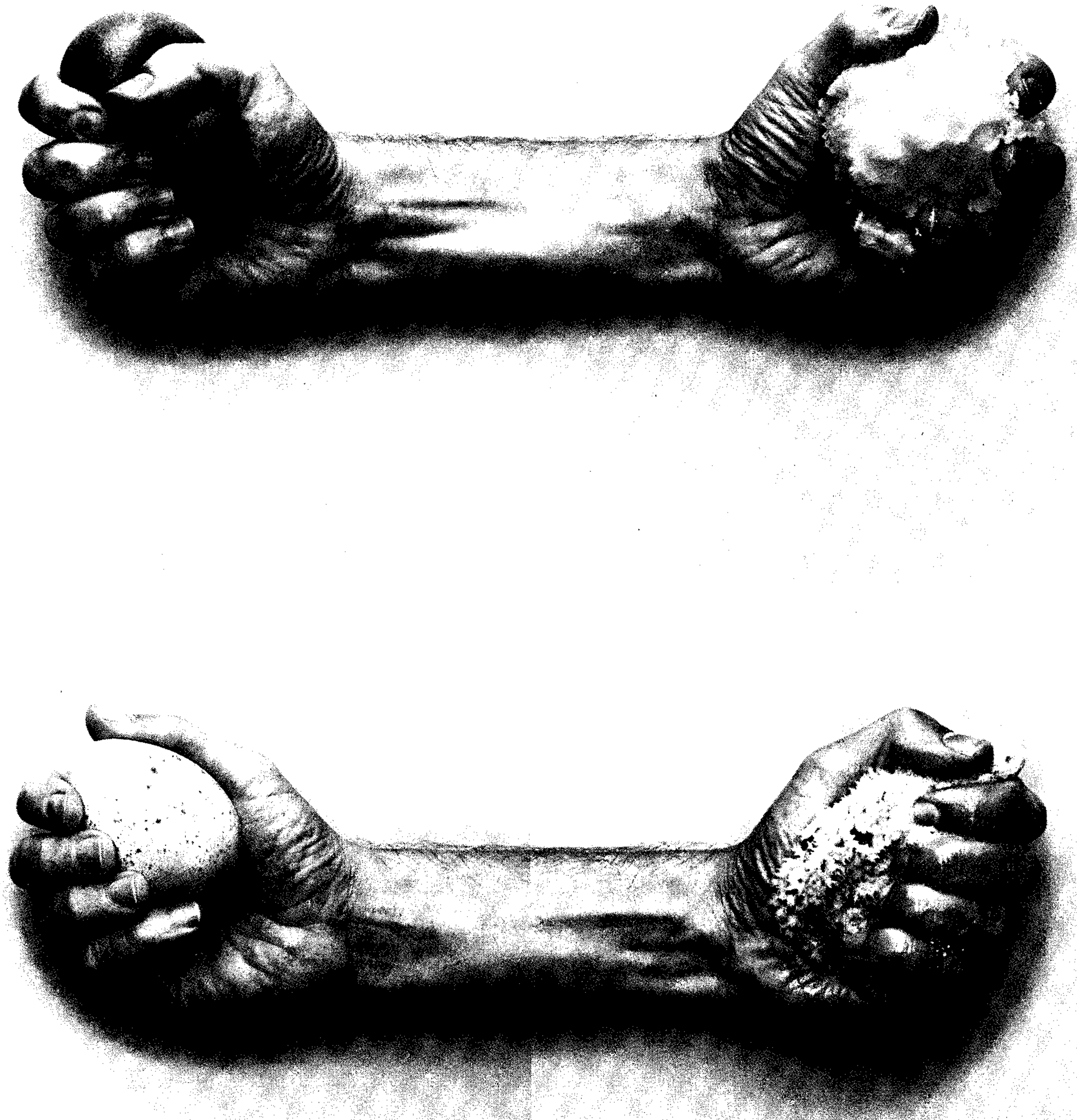

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